



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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BOOK REVIEW

ANDREW MURRAY by William Lindner Jr (Bethany House 1996)

Andrew Murray lived from 1828-1917. He was one of two brilliant sons of a Scottish missionary and minister in South Africa, who were sent to Scotland for their education and then to Holland for theological training. There he was converted at the age of 17 and he and John countered the degrading influence of corrupt and self-indulgent fellow-students by means of Christian and missionary clubs. Their training complete, both were appointed ministers and as soon as they got back to South Africa were given charge of churches by the ruling British government. His ministry and writing was in both Dutch and English. Andrew dedicated himself to pastoring in all its aspects and insisted so strongly on high spiritual values that he found himself unexpectedly at the head of a church in revival in 1860. Similar experiences of churches, brought to their knees in individual and collective repentance, followed. His father had made a practice of praying every Friday for revival. Andrew's leadership was so respected that he became Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa at the age of 34 and six times in all. He founded universities, schools and a missionary training institute. He fought legal battles for the state church. He made nine evangelistic tours of South Africa and several foreign speaking tours. At Keswick Convention in 1895 he gave a frank testimony admitting to ten years of struggling and of frequent failures to achieve his goals; and that he, like many writers, had sometimes written of things he had not yet attained to but "it is God that worketh all in all". Later he wrote "The desire that God puts into your heart He will fulfil". At 52 he lost his voice over a

three-year period and it was then that his writing ministry blossomed. Following that severe trial he entered into perhaps the most blessed time of his life. In retirement his daughter Annie assisted him in writing numerous books on various devotional subjects. He retired at the age of 78 and died at 88.

His writings include: *The Power of the Blood of Christ*, *The Ministry of Intercession*, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, *Raising Your Children for Christ*, *Working for God*, *Abide in Christ*, and a series: *The Believer's Secret...* of a *Perfect Heart*, of the *Master's Indwelling*, of *Spiritual Power*, of *Obedience*, of *Living like Christ*, of *Holiness*, of the *Abiding Presence*, of *Waiting on God*, and another series: *The Believer's Absolute Surrender*, *Call to Commitment*, *Full Blessing of Pentecost*, *New Covenant*, *New Life*, *Prophet, Priest and King*, *Prayer Life*, *School of Prayer*, *Daily Renewal*; *The Secret of Believing Prayer*, *The Spirit of Christ*, *Day by Day with Andrew Murray*, *Revival*, *The Inner Life*, *God's Best Secrets*, *Not My Will*, *Confession and Forgiveness*, *Have Mercy on Me* (Psalm 51).

Gone from us

Sister Ethel Thurman (*Barnsley*)

Brother Ned Darke (*Milburne Port*)

Till the day break, and the shadows flee away.

A WORD FOR THE YEAR

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4.13).

The admonitions and instructions written by the Apostle Paul while in prison in Rome to his son-in-the-faith, Timothy, have always been considered of the highest importance to Christian ministers and pastors and teachers. The skilful blending of the pastoral with instruction and of Christian conduct with Christian doctrine sets a pattern which we should all seek carefully to follow. Unfortunately, we are, none of us, so well balanced in mind on these things as was the Apostle Paul and we tend to fall more or less heavily on either the 'devotional' or the 'doctrinal' side of the fence. Happy are we if we can combine the two into a fully balanced and spiritually profitable ministry. So much depends on those to whom it falls to guide the minds and lives of the believers. The office of a pastor or an elder is a supremely important one and it is no wonder that Paul declares, *"If a man desires the office of an elder, he desireth a good work"*. An elder then *"must be blameless..."* and so on (1 Tim. 3.1).

It is a pity that so many who lay supreme stress upon the doctrinal aspects of the Divine Word and the importance of an accurate intellectual understanding of the philosophy of the Plan of Redemption are themselves such poor advertisements for the efficacy of the things which they believe. So dogmatic are their claims that a goodly number of the flock are repelled and driven to the purely devotional side, to their own loss and damage to the cause which we serve. If it is true (and it is true) that *"my people perish for lack of knowledge"* then we cannot afford to ignore those things in the Word which are generally classed as doctrine. We must respect each other's divergent conclusions in such matters and yet make proper progress in our personal understanding of doctrine. Unless we have these and at the same time preserve the essential *"unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* which is the hallmark and evidence of our Divine sonship, then neither doctrine nor devotion will do us any good at all. The attitude that is manifested all too often by the more bigoted of the Christian fellowship reminds us of Paul's words, *"But if ye bite and devour one another, take*

heed that ye be not consumed one of another." (Gal. 5.15)

Perhaps we can learn a lesson along this line from Moses, in Israel's opinion the greatest man who ever lived or ever would live. He had tenacity and strength of character. He was learned in the Law of God and in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. With this and all his walking and talking with God, whom the Lord *"knew face to face"* he was so intrinsically modest and humble that he was known as *"the meekest man in all the earth"*. Does that fact persuade us that knowledge of doctrine, of the Divine mysteries, essential as it is in one who is called to be a Christian minister, is effectual only when it is combined with, and subject to, sincere humility and an abiding submission to the wisdom of God? So too Paul, who more than any of the other apostles has defined and expounded the doctrines of the Christian faith, described himself as *"less than the least of all saints"*, *"not meet to be called an apostle"*, (Eph. 3.8; 1 Cor. 15.9). The Book of Proverbs was not preserved and included in the Bible without purpose. Perhaps part of that purpose was for the instruction of those whose minds are exercised along these lines. There is a long exhortation to seek Divine wisdom in the early part of the Book that is familiar to most. *"Incline thine ear unto wisdom and apply thine heart to understanding. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as hid treasure; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God"* (Prov. 2.2-5). The wisdom chapters of the Book of Proverbs and their counterparts in the 'Book of Wisdom' in the Apocrypha are well worth reading and re-reading, studying and taking to heart for these are the things by which we must live and do our duty before God.

It has been said that Christian belief is a lake in which elephants can swim as well as antelopes drink. Whether elephants can in fact swim is a matter outside the present writer's zoological knowledge, but he can certainly testify to the truth of the simile. After all, the God who designed both elephants and antelopes is capable of making some disciples with a considerable capacity for doctrine

and others with much less, Yet each is able to make his or her calling and election sure by means of that capacity to assimilate which they do have. We do not have to think that those who attain entrance to the heavenly Kingdom must all attain to the same degree of knowledge although they do have to attain the mark of perfect love. Just as an elephant which persists in drinking no more water than an antelope would soon die, so one who has the capacity, ability and desire for an understanding of the doctrinal features of God's plan must pursue that aspect of the Christian life. Of such come those who stand as lights to the Church in the onward progress of understanding and enlightenment. It is to the clear-sightedness and intellectual insight of such that the Church owes the periodic advances in the Truth, the coming of new light on the Word of God, which marked certain significant points in the history of

the Age. It may be no exaggeration to say that the devotional leaders preserve the faith and steadfastness of the Church against the wearing down processes of daily life, whilst the doctrinal leaders beckon on to new heights of understanding which in turn gives new grounds for hope and expectation. All are members one of another and we shall find at the end that the processes of both head and heart will have played their part in bringing us to the glory land.

Returning to those elephants and antelopes, we need to remember that in the Kingdom visions of Isaiah the peaceable animals pass into the earthly paradise somewhat unchanged. The lions and the tigers only do so at the cost of discarding their carnivorous appetites and making their peace with the creatures upon whom they once preyed. That brings us again to Paul's words already quoted about people who bite and devour one another.

HIGH TIME TO AWAKE OUT OF SLEEP

"And that, knowing the time, ... it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." (Romans 13.11)

Those words were penned at a time when the Apostle Paul and many of the Early Church with him, had come to realise that the promised Second Coming of the Lord to set up His Kingdom of life and light was much farther away than they had thought. In the first flush of Christian enthusiasm the early believers had expected the Return to take place in their own lifetime. To what extent Paul now realised the long period destined to elapse before that longed-for happening would materialise we cannot say. He did at least know that he and his generation would be laid aside to await their crown of life and that many centuries pass before the returning Lord would come to raise His faithful ones from the dead and set up His Kingdom. If, in such circumstances, Paul could assure his readers it was high time to awake out of sleep, how much more forceful must the same exhortation be to us who live so much closer to the time of His revelation and His kingdom?

Paul was probably not speaking altogether from the dispensational point of view. He must have used the words largely from the personal standpoint. He and his converts were growing old together. Their first impetuous rush of youthful

energy was giving place to the slower stream of age and Paul knew that for many of them the end of life's experience was within measurable distance. Whether the Lord was to return within the century or not for another thousand years or more he knew that his companions must pass into death without seeing the fulfilment of their hopes and they knew it too. Hence there would creep upon some, quite naturally, a lessening of the first enthusiasm, a resigning of one's self to life as it was, a turning back, if ever so little, to the interests and distractions of this world and a corresponding partial indifference to the Calling. So Paul deemed necessary an exhortation to continued and unabated zeal for Christ, a shaking off the bands of apathy which were slowly closing upon some, for life was hastening on and the 'Day of Salvation' running its course. Only they that should endure to the end could hope to receive this "*so great Salvation*" and to those who already were coming near the end of their allotted span that salvation was indeed nearer than when they first believed.

There is almost a rhythmic process of waning and flagging zeal and love followed by a call to awaken, a revival of hope and enthusiasm and a consequent 'reform movement' that is characteristic of the history of the Christian Church. Indeed it is the pattern of the whole history of man in his

relation to God. Very little is known of conditions on earth between the Fall and the Flood. It is clear that the human race as a whole lapsed very quickly into ignorance of God and apathy as to the destiny of man. *"Let us eat and drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die"* might fairly sum up their philosophy if our Lord's allusion to the days that were before the Flood is appreciated. When one remembers the great length of time that Adam was alive and the clear knowledge of God he must have retained, even in his fallen condition, it seems surprising that godlessness should so quickly become rampant. The history of Cain's descendants shows that such was the case.

Turning for a moment to the discoveries of archaeologists and geologists, it is clear that whilst a high state of human civilisation and culture prevailed over part of the antediluvian world, there were many peoples that had become depraved and bestial both physically and mentally. The discoveries relating to what are known as 'Neanderthal' men can only be harmonised with the Bible account by supposing them to have been more or less savage antediluvian tribes probably sinking to that low existence within a few centuries after Eden. It need occasion no surprise to reflect upon the implication of Genesis 6 that by the time of the Flood, God and the ways of God were practically unknown in the world of men.

The catastrophe of the Flood caused a swift revulsion of feeling. Whatever view is taken of that event it appears that the first few generations that followed were intensely religious. There was a very sincere return to God. Perhaps those in the Ark realised that from the point of view of God's redemptive Plan it was "high time to awake out of sleep". It is certain that righteous Noah sensed the opportunity to make a fresh start in the world that God had given to his family. Probably there was great enthusiasm and there were high hopes when his sons set out to rebuild the shattered land of their birth. From the records of Genesis, brief though they are, it appears that the enthusiasm waned again until by the time of Terah, Abraham's father, even the line of Shem through whom Abraham came had relapsed into idolatry. A new and interesting light is shed upon this idolatry from the discoveries of recent years. The period immediately after the Flood is still very largely a closed book and it is not possible to be dogmatic as

to the number of centuries that elapsed between that event and the earliest reliable dates we have at the time of Abraham. There is however a wealth of information available concerning Abraham's day and the century or so immediately preceding him. From that information it is fairly clear that the idolatry of Abraham's native land was a corruption of a formerly pure and intelligent worship of the true God. The elaborate mythology of Babylon, which has been the model for nearly all subsequent false religions, bears a remarkable analogy with what we regard as the truth of Scripture. It seems clear that in those centuries there had been a steady decline in understanding of God and His purpose and that the true knowledge of God had all but vanished from the earth, until God called Abraham. Once more it could truly be said that a call came, *"high time to awake out of sleep"*. Abraham bestirred himself to reject the worship and interests of the land of his birth and set out to follow the leading of his God.

There is no need to repeat the story here. Suffice to remind ourselves that the bright light which blazed out over the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph made their epoch one of the best known and most fully described in the whole of Scripture. It is a record of rare activity and great triumphs of faith, that flickered out again in the darkness which settled over the tribes in Egypt. Then was fulfilled the prophecy which had declared *"know for surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they shall afflict them four hundred years."*

At the end of those years it was again high time to awake out of sleep. for God was about to take another great step forward in His Plan. God called Moses, prepared him over many years for the task for which He had called him and sent him to Egypt to lead his people away. In the strength and power of that great awakening they went forty years in the wilderness until they reached the Promised Land where they battled and fought until they had won for themselves and their children a place in which to dwell. Then they lost their early zeal and went to sleep again. Once more darkness settled down, illumined now and then by fitful flashes of national revival, none of which were long-lived, until the final carrying away into Babylon at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and the subsequent fall of that city before the conquering armies of Cyrus.

Again the time had come for a fresh development in the outworking of God's purpose, and again a national awakening out of sleep. The liberated captives with songs on their lips and gladness in their hearts pressed across the desert to rebuild their Temple and city, in full expectation that the darkness would never more close in upon them.

Of course it did and it needed the preaching of John the Baptist to awaken the nation to consciousness of the importance of the time. Now the Plan worked itself out in rapid steps. John had a new and urgent message never before heard. *"The kingdom of heaven is at hand"*. Almost before the purport of his message had been grasped there came another, One Who brought life and truth to the world and called men to an eternal awakening in which there should never be any more darkness at all. But those who had not heeded Moses and the prophets did not heed Him even though Christ rose from the dead. Of those that listened at first to His words, many left their first love as the centuries passed and darkness descended again. *"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept."* The Reformation was a time of partial awakening but sleep overpowered many of the partially awakened ones. When the first gleams of a coming change of dispensation approached, the age-old cry went out with greater force than ever before, *"It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed"*.

That is the call for today and it is more insistent than ever. Activity may be less pronounced but individual believers continue to proclaim the Kingdom message. Little groups here and there lay their hands to tasks that accomplish something for the Lord and His kingdom. We should not decry such efforts to the spreading of the Gospel of the Kingdom just because they may not come from some great and prominent Christian organisation. Neither should we disparage them because they do not attract widespread public attention or display noticeable results. It has always been a case of

"not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord of Hosts". The first and most important purpose of Christian activity during this Age is the training and qualification of the Christian believer himself for the greater work of the next Age. That is the most effective fruitage of all our evangelistic efforts, of whatsoever kind they be.

This is the background of the Apostle's exhortation to awake out of sleep. At every important time of dispensational change in past history there has been such an awakening. Now, in face of the most important change of all, the transition from "this present world" to the "new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness", we need to be alert and awake. We must be quick to discern the significance of current events and eager to grasp such opportunities of service as may be open to us. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonian Christians lays down three vital admonitions, *"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober ... And be at peace among yourselves"* (1 Thess. 5.6,13). There can be no marked advance, as a fellowship, in the understanding of the signs of the times unless we are united in spirit and purpose, manifesting the Spirit of Christ in our dealings one with another. Neither can there be effective service and evangelistic effort unless we arm ourselves with that spiritual dynamic which comes from the consciousness of a common ideal and a common purpose. Before we can wake up to the dispensational light and evangelical opportunities we need a heart-searching revival of our first faith and zeal leading to a spirit of brotherliness which over-rides all other considerations and fulfils within and between us the words of our Lord Jesus *"one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren"*. That is the awakening that must precede our next advance in the Master's service and it is to that awakening we must now apply the Apostle's words *"Knowing the time, it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed"*.

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sports kits, toys etc. will be much appreciated. So also will donations towards the heavy cost of warehouse storage at Huddersfield and transport containers from there to Africa. Every penny contributed is used in sending gifts to Africa. Cheques should be made payable to 'CART'. These and further enquiries should be sent to the Secretary, Guildford Tompkins, 'Whitegates,' Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield HD8 0LR.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

Part 1

The belief that Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin mother without the interposition of a human father was virtually unchallenged in Christian theology and among so-called Christian nations for seventeen centuries. Only during the last two hundred years has it been questioned. Present scepticism on the subject, originally confined to critics of the Christian faith now unhappily found amongst Christian laymen and penetrating the ordained ministry, is due to two main reasons. First, there is a reluctance to accept the historicity of any New Testament narrative involving the miraculous. Second, there is an increasing tendency to regard Jesus of Nazareth as a man of the human race, born in the same manner as other men. It is admitted that He was a remarkable man possessed of moral and mental stature above other men and the originator of a code of ethics that has never been surpassed by others but no more. His claim to have come to earth from God, as the Son of God and to have existed previously is quietly passed over. Those who still believe in the 'virgin birth' are dubbed old-fashioned and ignorant of the present-day attainments of modern knowledge and modern theology. This position stems from the contemporary idea that one religion is about as good as any other and valuable for the ethical standards it sets. Although those most closely concerned are quite unaware of the fact there is lamentable ignorance concerning the true relationship between God and man, and the Divine purpose in the creation of man.

The only authority on the subject of the virgin birth is the New Testament and its statements are the only basis that the fact can be asserted and maintained. If the New Testament is nothing more than the product of a few writers, eye-witnesses or not, of the things they recorded, without any guiding or overruling influence from above, then there is scope for human error, fallibility and credibility. The factual accuracy of their narratives might be open to criticism and question. If, on the contrary, the New Testament was Divinely intended for the instruction and enlightenment of Christians throughout all generations and if its contents were so overruled and its writers guided in their selection by the Holy Spirit, then it must be

accepted as a true statement of historical fact. Failure to do this calls in question the work of the Holy Spirit. This does not demand verbal inspiration of every word or grammatical inflexion in the written book but it does demand that what is stated as having happened or the general drift of words stated to have been spoken, must be accounted authoritative. Consequently, this involves the acceptance of happenings that cannot be explained by natural laws as at present understood and are termed miraculous. It is impossible to separate the miraculous elements in the stories of the birth from the life's ministry and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They must all be accepted or rejected together. Since the Christian faith is founded upon the truth of the Resurrection, one cannot reject the miraculous without destroying that foundation. "*If Christ be not raised*" said Paul "*our faith is vain*" (1 Cor. 15.17).

The basic principle relative to human salvation was well enunciated by the Apostle when he wrote to Timothy "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" (1 Tim. 1.15). Jesus said that He came from above, from the presence of the Father with whom He claimed to be in continual communion and union. The pre-existence of Christ prior to His entering the world at Bethlehem is an essential element in the right understanding of the Christian faith, and of the Divine purpose for man. In fact it is so for any approach to understanding the relation between the Father and the Son. He was with God in the beginning, says John at the commencement of his Gospel. The writer to the Hebrews describes him as "*the Son who is the effulgence of God's splendour and the stamp of God's very being, and sustains the universe by His word of power*" (Heb. 1.3 NEB). "*All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made*" (John 1.3). No mere man, born of man three quarters of the way through human history, as we know it, could be described in such terms. Added to these statements and others like them are the recorded words of Jesus such as "*I came forth from the Father and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father*" (John 16.28); "*Before Abraham*

was born I am" (John 8.58). And His final impassioned prayer "... and now Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (John 17.5 RSV).

From that world into this, from the glory of the spiritual to the limitations of the material, "*the Word was made flesh*" said John (1.14). The 'Word' (Gk. Logos) was the expression used by Jewish thinkers to define that personified identity enshrining within Himself the wisdom, command, will and purpose of God, through Whom the whole creation was to be brought into being and God made manifest to His creatures. Already supreme in Heaven, He now came to earth but in so doing He took upon himself the limitations of humanity in order truly to be one with them. He laid hold, not of angelic nature, but that of Abraham, i.e. of man, says the writer to the Hebrews (2.16). Perhaps the most vivid description of His entry into man's world is that given by Paul in Phil. 2.6-8 (RV) "*Who, being in the form of God ... emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men*". Scriptures such as these mean something more than the mere appearance on earth of a heavenly being shrouded in a body of flesh whereby to become visible like the theophanies of the Old Testament or the appearances of angels to men. The Son of God did in truth and fact partake of human nature, become man - as Hebrews has it, "*a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death.... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man*" (2.9), remaining always and completely the Lord from heaven but related now to His earthly environment through the limited compass of an earthly body. "*The first man (Adam) is of the earth, earthy, the second man (Christ) is the Lord from heaven*" says Paul (1 Cor. 15. 47).

With all this in mind it is logical to expect that the mode of entry of such an one into this world would be other than is normal to mankind. The human processes of birth involve the starting of a new life by means of natural powers conferred on man and handed down from generation to generation. This is not a case of starting a new life; here a pre-existing life is transferred to an incipient human organism and that is a different thing. There is another consideration; to be an effective Saviour of mankind Christ must be other

than of the Sons of Adam, "*For when we were yet without strength*" says Paul in Romans 5.6 "*in due time Christ died for the ungodly*". The words 'without strength' mean to be powerless, to be too weak to effect the desired end. All men, without exception, are without strength to effect either their own salvation or that of others. There must be One from outside the human race who of Himself has that power.

All this has a profound effect upon the doctrine of the Virgin Birth as it is presented in the narratives of Matthew and Luke.

The Two Witnesses

There are two accounts of the circumstances surrounding the nativity of Jesus, one in the Gospel of Matthew and one in that of Luke. Matthew was one of Jesus' disciples and wrote his Gospel in or about the year 50, some sixteen years after the Crucifixion. Luke, a companion of Paul, wrote his record less than ten years later. He spent some time in Judea with Paul and must have been acquainted with Mary. It is noticeable that Luke's account of the circumstances is written with Mary at the centre, whilst that of Matthew is from the standpoint of Joseph. Matthew may have known Joseph and could have had the story from him. At any rate both accounts were written by men who had been in contact with the people most concerned, and the facts they recorded were matters of personal knowledge and not hearsay. We can rest assured that the details related in these two Gospels came directly from Joseph and Mary themselves, and their trustworthiness is assured by the integrity of these two.

The story opens in Luke's first chapter, verses 27-38. Mary, a maiden of Nazareth, was betrothed to Joseph; the marriage had not yet taken place. To her came an angel of the Lord and although she was at first alarmed at his salutation she accepted his assurance that she had found favour with God. Upon her was to be conferred a great honour, that of becoming the mother of the Messiah, the Son of the Highest, the rightful heir to the throne of David. This must have come as wonderful news to Mary, for every pious Jewish girl cherished the hope that she might be the chosen mother of the Messiah. One thing puzzled her. She was not yet married and it had never been suggested or imagined in Israel that the Messiah would be born

in any other than the customary manner. "*How can this be*" she asked, "*seeing that I know not a man?*" ('know' - Gk *ginosko*, meaning to be intimate with). It is clear that Mary understood the angel's words to imply that she was to conceive a son unilaterally, without the intervention of a man and quite naturally she asked how this could come about. Had she interpreted the angel's words to mean that the firstborn son of her approaching marriage was the one intended, the question would not have been asked. The angel's response bears this out, for the succeeding verse yields an explanation which should be as satisfactory to enquirers of the Twentieth Century as it was to Mary at the time. She, at any rate, was satisfied. "*Behold, the handmaid of the Lord*" she said, "*Be it unto me according to thy word.*"

The angel's explanation expresses a tremendous revelation in remarkably few and simple words. "*The Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; therefore that holy one which is being begotten shall be called Son of God*". This declaration is so important, intended to explain to Mary the manner in which her conception would be accomplished, the words must be examined very critically. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon her would easily be understood. This was traditionally the manner in which the subject individual became a vehicle for the word and purpose of God; something in which man had no place and all that was done was by Divine power. This is confirmed by the succeeding expression "*the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee*" where 'Power' is *dunamis* meaning energy, in this case Divine as contrasted with human energy. Biologically, the male reproductive cell provides the energy that stimulates the female cell into activity and commences the process of growth. In this case, says Luke, that energy came, not from a human father but directly from the Most High. 'Overshadow' in the Greek means to envelop either as a cloud casting a shadow or a shining cloud enveloping a person with brightness, and is used in this latter sense in the story of the Transfiguration in all three synoptic Gospels. Mary was, as it were, enveloped by the energising power of the Holy Spirit and by this power the life transferred from heaven which became "*the man Christ Jesus*", became implanted within her. Mary

herself provided the maternal inheritance, the physical cell with its characteristics of heredity constituting human nature that made Jesus a son of David. The masculine counterpart, the nature and life of the One coming from above, enshrined in a material entity provided by an exercise of Divine power, became one with the waiting incipient organism, and in that manner "*the Word was made flesh*". Thus our Lord "*took hold of the seed of Abraham*".

The AV translation "*that holy thing which shall be born of thee*" is not very accurate. *Gennomenon* is the present tense of the verb, so that it should be rendered "is being begotten" or "is being born" as may be required by the context; the word means either. Since Jesus certainly was not being born at the time of this declaration and the moment of conception is usually spoken of as the begetting rather than the birth, the angel's words should properly be translated "that holy one which is being begotten", i.e. at that particular time. This one expression of itself rules out any participation of Joseph in the fatherhood of Jesus.

This is as far as Luke goes by way of explanation. The story of Jesus' birth, the coming of the shepherds and the presentation in the Temple are all presented in a simple and factual manner without further reference to the unique circumstance involved. From that time onward in Luke's narrative the family is pictured as an ordinary family and reference made to "*his parents*" and "*thy father and I*" in 2.41,48, in a perfectly ordinary manner. This is how it must have been. To friends and neighbours Jesus would have been accepted as the natural son of Joseph, as He was legally. Consideration for Mary would preclude any talk outside the family of the angelic visit and its associated circumstances. Any dissemination of the story would assuredly bring down upon her head the wrath and violence of the priestly authorities, who would certainly take a serious view of the implications involved in any such claim. It is fairly obvious that nothing was generally known of all this until after the death of Jesus and probably after the departure of Mary from Jerusalem to Ephesus where she is believed to have ended her life. Matthew and Luke most likely kept the facts to themselves until they came to write their Gospels later on.

Matthew tells the story from Joseph's

standpoint and hardly mentions Mary; the kind of detail he records makes it most likely that he derived his facts from Joseph himself, and this therefore must be considered first-hand testimony. Matt. 1.18 tells that after Mary's betrothal but "*before they came together* (the Greek word means to co-habit matrimonially) *she was found with child of the Holy Spirit*". It does not follow that, in the first shock of the discovery, Joseph believed her explanation, and in fact the narrative goes on to say that he began to consider how he could take the steps, usual in such cases, to annul the marriage contract without causing a public scandal. In the dilemma the angel of the Lord appeared to him and confirmed Mary's story (Matt. 1.20), at this Joseph believed. "*Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.... And she shall bring forth a son....*". It is evident that Joseph was a God-fearing man and instructed in the ways of God; he recognised that he had received a Divine revelation and without hesitation he followed the Divine injunction. He "*took unto him his wife, and knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son*" (1.24, 25).

This entire passage (Matt. 1.18-24) can only

have originated from Joseph and it states the position very clearly. During the betrothal period, which normally lasted twelve months, Joseph discovered, or more likely was told by Mary - that she was an expectant mother. He knew that he was not responsible. Contemplating annulment of the prospective marriage, he was dissuaded by intimation from on high that the coming child was not of man, but of God and destined to become the promised Messiah. Convinced that he was rightly informed he went ahead with the marriage as planned and Mary became his legal wife, but he refrained from matrimonial relations with her until after Jesus had been born. According to the law and custom of the day, he became the legal father of Jesus but he knew perfectly well in fact he was not the actual father. That story is perfectly straightforward and consistent and supported by all the ancient manuscripts with a few variations in certain Latin versions of the Second Century in which there is some suggestion of the paternity of Joseph. These versions are not consistent with themselves and are fairly certain to have been the result of alterations from the Greek original.

(To be concluded)

BARNABAS

*A character study of
a great Disciple*

Barnabas comes into view soon after Pentecost. The newly born Christian Church was beginning to demonstrate the sincerity of its faith by practical measures for the relief of poverty and sickness in its own midst. He comes striding through the assembly of the brethren to add his offering to those already contributed to the furtherance of that work.

The senior disciples, Peter, John and James stood receiving the gifts; he walked up to them and laid down a bag of money, proceeds from the sale of land which he had owned in Jerusalem. There was a murmur of approbation from the spectators, for Barnabas was already known to them as one of the earliest converts to the faith, a man of integrity and generosity, one marked out for distinguished service in the cause of Christ. The history of later years confirmed that he was indeed a man of sterling worth.

Barnabas was not a native of Judea. He was

what is called a Jew of the Dispersion, that is, a Jew born in some foreign country of Jewish parents who themselves or perhaps their ancestors had migrated from the land of Israel at some past time to make their home in foreign parts. There were many such; the strange circumstances of war and unrest had sent them into a form of exile and so then, as now, Jews were to be found in every part of the known world. Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, not far from Judea but at the present time for a reason not stated he was living in Jerusalem. He had a sister, Mary, also living in Jerusalem with her young son, John Mark, who afterwards became famous as the writer of the Gospel according to Mark. As a Jew of the wider world, he was a more knowledgeable and open-hearted man than the rather parochially minded Jews of Jerusalem and this fact made him the man of the moment at a crucial point in the history of the Church.

Seven years after our Lord's death Saul of

Tarsus was walking the streets of Jerusalem with a problem. Some three years earlier as a militant Pharisee intent on the persecution of the emerging Christian Church, he had experienced the vision on the Damascus road which had changed his life and made him a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ for ever. Now, for the first time since that conversion he was back in Jerusalem but the Christians would have nothing to do with him. They all knew him for what he had been, a relentless enemy of them all and they did not believe his story that he was now one of them. They suspected a trap (Acts 9.26-27). His old colleagues among the Pharisees and priests had of course washed their hands of him and now he was friendless and alone, uncertain what to do next. At this juncture he and Barnabas met. It is probable that they were old friends for Barnabas knew all about his experiences at Damascus and was able therefore to take him back to the brethren and vouch for his sincerity and trustworthiness. So for a short while Barnabas and Saul worked with the Jerusalem brethren in the proclamation of the Gospel. It was not long though before Saul's turbulent nature got him into trouble with the orthodox Jews. For his own safety and for theirs, the brethren shipped him off to his own native city of Tarsus, there to cool his heels awaiting some definite indication from his Master as to how his life's work was to develop.

Barnabas remained, sharing with Peter and the others in the work going on in Jerusalem, where the message of Christ was being preached mightily and finding a wide response. The Church was increasing in numbers and influence, although as yet it was not much more than a sect of Judaism. That the Gospel was intended for Gentiles as well as Jews had hardly begun to be realised until the news came that Christian churches were springing up outside Judea and that Gentiles as well as Jews were being accepted. Antioch of Syria was named as one notable example. The Church realised that authentic information about this development was necessary and a reliable man was needed to embark upon an investigating trip and come back with a full report. The man chosen was Barnabas.

"A good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" is how he was described on this occasion (Acts 11.22-24). In the event he is seen to have been resourceful and decisive also. He came to

Antioch and threw himself into the fellowship and work of the Church there and speedily realised that a great and momentous opening for the work of the Faith was being done and needed the right man to take a lead. A lesser man might have been tempted to step into the vacant position as leader of the Church but not so Barnabas. He knew just who was the right man for this work and without delay he took ship to cross the hundred miles of sea to Tarsus in Cilicia and sought out his old friend Saul (Acts 11.25-26).

For twelve months these two worked at Antioch building up the Church and making known the appeal of the Gospel throughout Syria. Antioch was at this time a magnificent city of half a million inhabitants, ranking politically next to Rome and Alexandria in importance. It was the official residence of the Roman governor of Syria and a busy commercial centre. It was adorned with many handsome buildings and public monuments and was in no respect inferior to Rome itself in splendour and luxury. The growing Church therefore must have included many educated and wealthy men. Under the pastoral care of Barnabas and Saul all these, some Jews and some Greek and Roman pagans, became notable examples of the power of Christ to transform men from the power of darkness to the image of the living God.

Another deputation arrived from Jerusalem, with an intimation by the Holy Spirit, through a believer named Agabus that a time of great famine and scarcity was shortly to come upon the world (says Luke by way of comment *"which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar"* Acts 11.28, a fact testified by contemporary historians). The feeling of the Antioch Church was that in the light of this prediction they, with their wealth and resources ought to send a money gift for the relief of the anticipated consequent suffering of the poorer Church in Jerusalem. *"Which also they did, and sent it unto the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul"* (Acts 11.30). It is to be noted that at this time Barnabas is always mentioned before Saul. He was the senior partner of the two and although in later years this was to change, it is a tribute to the character and worth of Barnabas that at this earlier time he should be regarded as the leader. It seems as if the key disciple in the development of the great Church at Antioch was Barnabas.

The commission executed, the two returned to Antioch and to their pastoral duties bringing with them John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas. Mark would be twenty-two years of age at this time and apparently giving promise of becoming a useful worker for the Lord. It was evidently intended that he should play some part in the missionary outreach which was beginning to form an important part of the life and activities of the Antioch Church. It looks as if Barnabas was always looking for new promising material for the furtherance of the Gospel and now he felt he had found such in his young nephew. The later known history of Mark is evidence that his judgement was rightly founded.

The time for action came soon, perhaps not more than a year or so later. The Church now had a number of senior men, pastors and teachers well versed in the Gospel of Christ and well able to care for the flock (Acts 13.1). Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, all are named in addition to the two original stalwarts. The Church decided, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, that two of their leaders could now be spared for an ambitious missionary trip into Roman Asia. The two selected, after much prayer and careful thought, were Barnabas and Saul, Barnabas again being alluded to as the leader. They were sent forth, together with Mark as their assistant, with the prayers and exhortations of the home Church. With those words ringing in their ears they went down to Seleucia, the port of Antioch sixteen miles away and found a ship to take them to Cyprus, two days' sailing distant.

This is where Barnabas began, willingly, no doubt, to concede first place to Saul. It would seem that Saul was the more fluent speaker. It might be and such evidence as there is seems to confirm the thought, that Barnabas excelled more in the field of pastoral care and exhortation than in that of public preaching of the faith. It is Saul who from now on does the speaking and the expression 'Paul and Barnabas' replaces 'Barnabas and Saul'. At this point also Paul adopted the more familiar Roman form of his name in preference to the Hebrew 'Saul'. Barnabas has one more moment of precedence.

They crossed the sea again from Cyprus to Roman Asia at which point John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. The two older men continued on their way and eventually arrived at Lystra in

the province of Lycaonia. It was here that Paul performed a notable miracle, the instantaneous healing of a man who had been hopelessly crippled from birth (Acts 14.8-18). The reaction of the bystanders was unexpected. This miraculous healing caused them to jump to the conclusion that two of the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men. Paul, they reasoned, "because he was the chief speaker" must be Hermes the messenger of the gods, whilst Barnabas could be no other than Zeus the supreme god of all (these are their Greek names; the A.V. has adopted their Latin equivalents, Mercurius and Jupiter). There is this indication that Barnabas was a tall and well-built man, for Zeus was always pictured as huge and overpowering. Without more ado the High Priest of Zeus set about acknowledging this signal honour conferred upon the city by collecting oxen and garlands and preparing to offer a sacrifice. His enthusiasm was probably considerably increased by the fact that, according to their historians, Zeus had once before, long ages previously visited the district in the guise of an old man and been treated rather unceremoniously by the citizens. Finding only one old couple who would give him hospitality, Zeus took his revenge in the fashion quite normal with the proverbially short-tempered god of Greece. The priests and people of Lystra were not going to be caught a second time, and Barnabas and Paul found to their dismay that they were being accorded full divine honours. The two missionaries hurriedly and vehemently repudiated the identification; as Jews, to be adored as gods must have sent a wave of revulsion through every fibre of their being. Before long they were on the road again to their next stop and the brief moment of divinity was over. Eventually they completed the planned tour and returned to Antioch to report the results of their work to those who had sent them out.

There followed something like seven years of pastoral and evangelical ministry at Antioch with Barnabas and Paul the recognised leaders of the church in all its life and affairs. That phase was interrupted when a number of brethren from the Jerusalem Church arrived with the old insistence that the Gentile converts should conform to the Mosaic Law. The native Jewish converts to Christianity in Jerusalem never did fully realise that acceptance into Christ nullified all obligation to the covenant of Moses. The result of this was

that Barnabas and Paul made another visit to Jerusalem to discuss and arrive at an agreement on this matter; the account of which appears in Acts 15.

Not long after that excursion Paul recommended another missionary journey to visit all the communities they had originally founded with the object of strengthening them in the faith. Barnabas willingly concurred and expected that his nephew John Mark would accompany them as he had done on the first journey. He met an unexpected objection. Paul remembered that Mark had left them halfway through the first tour and he was not willing to accept him again. Why Mark left them on that occasion is not stated and not known; it has been surmised that with the breaking out of persecution in Judea he felt he should return to be with his mother in Jerusalem. At any rate this apparently led to a strong disagreement. Barnabas insisted and Paul refused. The result was that for the first time in their long association, going back to the beginning of Paul's Christian life, they separated. Paul chose Silas, another leading figure in the Antioch Church and went off on the planned tour and now called his second missionary journey, whilst Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus where they had first planted the seed of the Word (Acts 15.36-41). There is no record of his subsequent service, as there was with Paul by the ready pen of Luke. It is known that Barnabas went to Cyprus and that is all.

One wonders why his nephew Mark did not record the progress of that unknown missionary tour. Mark was a writer of no mean skill, as demonstrated by the Gospel that bears his name. He was only a boy of fourteen or so at the time of Jesus' life on earth but he bequeathed a vivid account of the things Jesus said and did. Why did he not do the same for his uncle? Mark himself disappeared from the Church's history for the next ten years. When he does reappear it is when Paul is in the condemned cell at Rome and Mark is one of his faithful companions. What happened in the meantime?

The most likely hypothesis is that Barnabas was dead. He must have been about sixty years of age at the time of his separation from Paul. It is asserted by early Church historians of the first two centuries, relying upon beliefs handed down through the first six generations of Christians, that

he was martyred at Salamis, the entry port of Cyprus, after he parted from Paul. The story is that while preaching in the synagogue he was set upon and murdered by Jews from Syria who resented the effect of his work in Antioch. That, if true, would at least explain why there is no further mention of him in the New Testament, and no inclusion of his name with those who send greetings or to whom greetings are sent. Paul, writing to the Corinthians from Ephesus about three years later spoke of Barnabas as though he was still alive (1 Cor.9.6) but this could be explained by the fact that if Barnabas did meet his end in Cyprus there was no way that Paul could be apprised of the fact until he got back to Antioch later still, even if then. Only Mark was with his uncle and his absence from the history of the Church probably means that he went back to Jerusalem and only in after years became associated with the Antioch and Ephesus brethren again.

In Barnabas we are left with the picture of a generous, warm-hearted man who gave himself wholeheartedly to the cause of Christ as soon as he came into contact with it. One tradition says that he was originally one of the seventy evangelists whom Jesus sent forth to preach in the villages of Judea (Luke 10.1). There is no New Testament evidence for this but he was certainly one of the believers immediately after Pentecost. His personality and character were that of a father in Israel, a pastor and a shepherd, able to comfort and encourage the believers in the life they should live and without doubt a tower of strength in times of stress and persecution. His real name was Joses, a Levite. Barnabas appears to be the name given him by the brethren, a name which means in Hebrew 'son of exhortation' and this yields a strong clue to his character; ('consolation' in Acts 4.36 is not very accurate; the Greek word *paraklesis* means a comforting or stirring exhortation as in Heb. 12.5 and Acts 13.15). Theology as such was perhaps not his strong point, at least in the field of public oratory, which could explain why Paul superseded him in that field. As a minister and pastor in the assembly, Barnabas probably stood supreme and it may well be that to him, more than any other man, must be credited the rapid and stable growth of the Antioch Church. Of all the well-known Christian communities whose activities are recorded in the New Testament that at Antioch shows the best and

happiest harmony between Christian Jew and Christian Greek, between theology, devotional life and evangelism, between Church fellowship and missionary endeavour. The name 'Christian' was first applied to believers at Antioch. All the evidence goes to show that this was a remarkable Church founded upon a basis of sound Scriptural teaching in a spirit of mutual tolerance combined

with certainty of personal conviction on matters concerning the faith. Barnabas went to his rest quietly to await his Lord. The Church he so valiantly helped to found and in whose founding he played so great a part lived on for centuries after his death, a bulwark of the Faith in a Church rapidly relapsing into formalism and unbelief.

THE PATHS OF MERCY AND TRUTH

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant" Psalm 25.7.

It is extremely sweet doctrine to be assured that every step of the consecrated life is under the control of our loving Father in heaven. At all times it is comforting to be reminded that *"All things work together for good, to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose"* but it is especially helpful to have this assurance repeated frequently in seasons of trial and difficulty. Most of the children of God are such leaking vessels, that the sweetness of the morning's promise is apt to be forgotten before tired eyelids close for the night's repose. For that reason every consecrated child of God needs the frequent reminder that every phase of his life is under the supervision of an eye that never sleeps and that all the way he is kept in the hollow of a hand that never grows weary. It is not that we want to forget that sublime fact nor is it that we find any pleasure in the slips of memory which afflict our advancing years. Summers and winters steal by with increasing speed (or so it seems). It is because modern life is so full of responsibilities of many kinds, the things that belong to the higher life seem at times to be crowded into a very small corner of our day even if they are not fully crowded out for a time. No true child of the Father in heaven is ever averse to being reminded again and again of that loving Father's care. He will find it soothing to his heart after a worrying day, to be told again that he is one of the sheep of His pasture and that the Lord is his shepherd. Whether his pathway lies through the green pastures or the valley of shadows, the Lord is with him to keep and protect him all the way. When the tender spirit of the New Creature has been wounded by the instability or harshness of some poor son of Adam, how good it is to be told of a Friend who standeth closer than any

brother, to whisper a word of comfort to our aching heart. It is the perfect end to any day to be able to listen to the gentle assurance of tongue or pen that no act or word need have cost us our Father's smile. It is not that the day's page would not show blot or smudge (for indeed, no day is entirely free from shortcoming or failure) but because by the grace of God, so many of His paths are paths of mercy. Long ago, the Father of mercies made provision for our need. He sent down from heaven a Saviour, who, by His death can save His people from their sins. He was without sin yet in His compassionate love for men. He became the bearer of their sins. He gave Himself *"the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God"* (1 Pet. 3.18). He reconciled us by His death; He now lives to save us by His living and loving care. (Rom. 5.10). The path of mercy from our first feeble Christian days till now is hedged about by His precious blood. It is a scarlet trail for that precious blood made possible our first faltering step in Grace, and precious blood has made safe our every further step.

From those first feeble feelings after God, when escaping from the darkness of sin, till now we know our God (and also are known of Him) the blood upon the lintel has been the constant pledge of our security and safety. No day has passed but that we have drawn upon the store of compassionate mercy; yet our constant claims have not impoverished the store nor exhausted its supply. The resources of grace have been new every morning and fresh with each evening's shades. That precious blood was of compensating worth for every man and for all time and because Divine law was satisfied, Divine grace has been free to come to our relief, abundantly, yea more than that, we have received superabundantly of His grace. Thus many paths in our lives which the Lord has directed have had their commencement in His mercy, while all

along the way the shady bowers and quiet resting places have been fragrant with His grace. Let us thank our gracious God for His goodness.

Along with grace He gave us knowledge; along with mercy He gave us truth! "*The paths of the Lord are mercy and truth.*" First, those simple elementary truths which told us of our need of a Saviour to free us from our sins and to release us from Father Adam's condemnation. The truth about God's own love was wonderful; it cost Him His dear Son. The greatness of His gift was the measure of His love. That truth was sweet to our famished hearts. It was the first satisfying truth we had ever learned. No collegiate course ever imparted truth so satisfying and refreshing. Nor has an instruction from any other source in later days brought such abiding joy. To the end of our earthly days, nay, let us say for all eternity, the remembrance of that blessed fact that God loved the world so much that He gave His son to die, will never lose its soul reviving power.

Redeeming love was but the prelude to paternal love. We learned another transcendent truth that He who redeemed us at such infinite cost desired to have us as His sons and daughters. He called us to follow in the footsteps of His first-born son, that we might enter the innermost circle of His family and be the Father's eternal delight. Our gracious God caused His beloved Son to become for us a channel of wisdom, justification, sanctification and ultimate Redemption. In order that all these steps of grace might be realised and experienced in us He gave us truth accordant with each step. He taught us not only to learn the truth but also how to profit by that truth. Knowledge thus acquired then rightly applied became in us 'wisdom'. Knowledge that the victim died for sin (that means among other things, for **my** sin, for **our** sins) led us hum-

bly to seek our acquittal at God's hands, so that henceforth there should be no condemnation laid to our charge.

Knowledge that God desired the submission of our lives so that we should no longer serve sin but live solely unto Him, brought us to the point where He could invest us with His holiness and set us apart to His will and purpose. What a wonderful school God keeps! What an excellent syllabus He has arranged! How incomparable is the education He provides! He educates His pupils for eternity, for omniscience! He trains them for kingship of this highest throne! He dedicates them for a priesthood, to succour untold millions 'who are out of the way!' He moulds them to be replicas of Himself, to be channels of His great love, of infinite mercy and tender compassion.

This is so wonderful, **but** this glorious accomplishment is contingent upon the keeping of "his covenant and testimonies". There is a '**but**' in this overflow of grace. God required as the condition of His oversight in our lives, first a covenant of sacrifice, a vow intelligently and solemnly sworn and then obedience to His Sovereign will throughout our days. Disobedience would dam the refreshing streams of mercy and grace. Forwardness and presumption would blight the fruitage of His truth. His Word would cease to satisfy and soul hunger such as no plenty on earth could gratify would set in. If His children keep His covenant and observe His testimonies then "*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature*" can interfere or block one single path of the Lord's mercy and truth in their lives. Do we know that this is true? Then happy indeed are we!

NOTICES

The Virgin Birth of Christ is the title of a booklet which was published in 1972. The first of two parts appears in this issue and the second will be published in the March/April BSM. A reprint of the booklet may be announced later in the year.

Authors' names have appeared with articles during the past four years. As from this issue that practice will cease. Acknowledgement of sources other than BFU will continue. If at any time we

should fail to so acknowledge, we apologise. Readers who wish to know more concerning authorship are welcome to write to us.

'The Exodus' series, part 2, unavoidably absent from the Nov/Dec BSM, now appears in this issue. This is an unusual section of the study and may attract criticism. However, we hope that it may answer some questions.

THE SAVING POWER OF GOD

1. Need of Salvation

"I have obligations to Greek and non-Greek, to learned and simple; hence my eagerness to declare the gospel in Rome as well. For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the saving power of God for everyone who has faith....." (Romans 1.16 REB).

As a Jew Paul had been brought up to believe that he could only be made right with God by obeying the Law given through Moses and that meant that the death of Jesus upon a cross was offensive. Paul was also familiar with Greek thought and so to educated Gentiles the Gospel seemed nonsense. The Jewish people had to learn that their teaching on salvation was but a prelude and shadow of the work that God was doing through Christ. The Greeks with their much learning must discover at last that human wisdom cannot deliver from sin and bring eternal life; only the wisdom of God can do that.

Paul claimed to be the apostle to the Gentiles and he was better qualified than his brother apostles to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the Empire. He was brought up to be a Roman citizen amid Greek culture and he would be well aware of its philosophy. Although he was so well equipped to address his message to the Greek-speaking world, his letters to young churches show that in his thinking he remained very much a Hebrew. His parental upbringing and his education in Jerusalem with the foremost Jewish scholar of his day, saw to that. His sermons recorded in the Acts bear the same witness that he was *"an Israelite worthy of the name"*. He wrote and spoke the language of the Old Testament. It was the Law, the Writings and the Prophets that so deeply influenced all that he had to say about the Saviour of mankind. Only occasionally did he use Greek ideas, examples of which can be shown in his address to Greeks at Athens (Acts 17.22-31), his references to conscience (Rom. 2.15), and his desire to be all things to all men (1 Cor. 9.22).

In his early years Paul had been a strict and high-ranking Pharisee and something of his early background lingered with him into his latter days (Acts 23.6; 26.5). His letter to the church at Philippi (3.7-11) shows that although he had been a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he no longer accepted his legal position as a son of Israel. He declares that the only way to obtain a right relationship with God

was through union by faith with Christ. Paul's realisation that the Law, which he had been taught to obey, was clearly unable to free him from the slavery of sin, was wrung from him in the despairing words of Romans 7. 24. In order to meet God's requirements Paul knew that something greater than the Law of Moses was needed. His discovery of the longed-for freedom and escape from the old nature is described in his own words to the Roman church (8.2 RSV). *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death"*. Only by this law could he please his Creator.

Paul used the ideas contained in the Old Testament about atonement from sin but his language must be understood in the light of the work of Christ. As a Jew he had once blasphemed against that work (Acts 26.9-11) and had been the 'biggest sinner' against it. Now he could show that the history, rules and descriptions of Israel's relationship to God contained pictures of the work of the Saviour who was greater than Moses. The great law-giver had said that God would raise up a prophet *"like me"* and that prophecy had now been fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. He came to establish a more permanent way of redemption and covenant than that revealed at Sinai. Paul contrasted the splendour of the old and new dispensations and within Paul's language it is possible to see Christ as the New Israel and his Word as the New Torah or Law. (Gal. 6.16)

Israel's national life began in their deliverance from Egypt. It was established when God made a covenant with them when He gave them the tablets of stone. Israel regarded their release from the bondage of Pharaoh as a mighty act of God and the troubles which Egypt suffered as His judgment upon His enemies. They too would have suffered a similar loss had they not splashed the door posts and lintels of their houses with the lamb's blood. Their liberation from Egyptian bondage sprang from the love of God and not because they were such a fine group of people, as shown in the revelation of His purpose revealed to the patriarchs (Deut. 7.7,8). That was the "historic act of redemption" and Israel forever looked back to it. They saw the greatness and goodness of God and were inspired to sing songs such as Psalms 105 and

111. The Exodus for them was a turning of their backs upon bondage, suffering and death and a moving forward to life and peace and joy in a homeland of their own.

The relationship which the Lord had with Israel in the covenant of Sinai, involved the people in a promise of obedience to the Divine Law as revealed to Moses (Exodus 24.3). It is evident that Paul saw the giving of the Law as a recognition of failure by Israel to attain to the faith relationship which had obtained in the days of their fathers (Galatians 3. 19). It is also clear from the account in Exodus that the Israelites would not always be faithful to the agreement with God and that provision would be needed in the covenant to restore the original arrangement. The whole of the nation's life was corporately bound up in the terms of the covenant and was symbolised in the blood of the animals which were slain at its ratification (Exodus 24. 3-8). The life of the animal was in the blood and this blood was sprinkled upon the people and upon the 'book'. The 'book' or law in the ceremony represented God Himself and the blood had been sprinkled upon both parties to the covenant. This act of sharing the blood meant that God and His people were sharing one life together (Hebrews 9.19, 20). Abraham experienced a ceremony with the same meaning in the making of the covenant recorded in Genesis 15. Disobedience to God was seen more in terms of transgressing the covenant relationship than in the moral sin as modern man might understand it. The important issue for Israel was to retain the union with Yahweh rather than rectify any ethical obligations in which they might have failed. Even in the Twentieth century western legal principles have in the past appeared to require restitution to society by an offender rather than reparation to the member of that society who has actually suffered from the offence. When David's attention was drawn to the terrible wrong that he had done to Uriah the Hittite his first exclamation of guilt was "I have sinned against the Lord" and in Psalm 51 so closely linked with David's disobedience to the commandments, he cried out "*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned*". David had broken the covenant between himself and God which in fact was between Yahweh and Israel. This may help us also to understand why all Israel suffered later when David sinned again, by numbering the people. "No man is an island" and when an individual commits a crime the whole of

society is affected in some way.

On the other hand while reconciliation between God and His people was of the greatest importance to their peace and harmony as a nation, the Law defined in detail a moral code in which individuals were expected to have respect and concern for their neighbours. This developed in later days in the work and writings of the prophets who recognised more clearly that just as Yahweh expected His people to maintain their side of the covenant in obedience to the law, He too was utterly faithful in keeping the rules of the agreement.

In the New Testament the atonement from sin is 'The Work of Christ' wonderfully summarised in the familiar text of John 3.16,17. Paul came nearer to systematically explaining this subject than anyone else, and that more particularly in his letter to the Romans. However, Paul was a good Hebrew thinker and his theology was therefore practical. Instead of bringing all the aspects of Atonement together in one great treatise he dealt with them individually and spontaneously as appropriate to his practical instruction. Those various aspects need individual study.

During the history of the Church many efforts have been made to try to explain how God's great plan of redemption works. All (except for a few) agree with Paul and other New Testament writers but not all agree with each other. Many regard their own explanations as definitive requiring no further study or discussion. That is a disastrous attitude in the search for truth because it makes opinions and interpretations mandatory for belief. It also casts doubts on the honestly held opinions of others even to the point of regarding them as unbelievers. It was an attitude that caused some who claimed to be followers of Jesus to practice the crimes of the rack and stake. Perhaps such conflict and division has occurred for no other Christian doctrine more than that which is intended to describe 'reconciliation'. Such an attitude is spiritually more disastrous for those who adopt it than for those whom they criticise.

The parts of this series that will appear subsequently are presented most humbly with the motive that they may help us all to see through that dark glass a little more clearly, or to use a more up to date translation of 1 Cor. 13.12 that the reflections may become a little less puzzling, at least for some.

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

Amos 6.1-14

7. The Doom of Kings

The military powers, the social and commercial structure and the religious organization, have in turn felt the lash of the prophet's tongue; now it is the turn of the rulers, the kings and courtiers. Chapter 6 enshrines his invective against them and by the time he has finished they can have no doubt as to their position in the eyes of the Lord. It is noteworthy that both kings, of Judah as well as of Israel, are included in the condemnation and the sentence, although Judah was to endure as a nation for over one hundred years after Israel had been carried into captivity and the northern kingdom brought to an end. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that in the time of Amos and for a considerable time thereafter there were still some redeeming features in Judah. At least three good kings, Hezekiah, Uzziah and Josiah, were to come to the throne of Judah and exert some influence for good. In the case of Israel the rot had already gone too far and there was no hope whatever of reform. There is in this a clear view of the forbearance and patience of God. While there is any possibility whatever that the straying one will repent and return, the Lord will, like the father in the story of the prodigal son, come out to meet him halfway and receive him with joy, all the past forgotten. This is the guarantee that no man can be eternally lost until he has knowingly and wilfully in the face of full light and knowledge and no hindering influence, rejected the Divine offer of life, deliberately turning away from the Giver and Sustainer of all life. In a typical sense, in the context of history, this is what the northern kingdom had done. God in His wisdom saw that the nation was incorrigible. They would not repent without the supreme lesson and tragedy and so reluctantly and with deep concern of heart we may be sure, He lifted His restraining hand and allowed the Assyrians to come and take them all away. *"Woe to the wealthy in Zion, and those who trust in the mountains of Samaria, ye great men who are the heads of the people who present yourselves in state before the house of Israel"* (ch. 6.1).

Adroitly Amos links in one common condemnation the king of Judah, ruling at Jerusalem and the king of the ten tribes, ruling at Samaria. Yet both stood before God as one people,

the twelve-tribe nation of Israel. Zion here is a synonym for Jerusalem, the palace of the kings, situated on Mount Zion. This means Jerusalem in its royal aspect, just as Mount Moriah, on which the Temple stood, indicated its religious aspect. Amos proclaims woe to both lines of kings for both stand guilty in the sight of God.

Now Amos invites them to look at some of the surrounding nations who had already fallen victims to the Assyrian menace and consider whether they themselves are any better and more powerful than they. *"Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great. Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are ye any better than them; is your territory any larger than theirs?"* (ch. 6.2). Only recently has the land of Calneh been positively identified. It is named in Assyrian inscriptions as Kullania, a powerful State to the north of Syria on the west bank of the Euphrates. Hamath has long been known to be an equally important State, adjacent to and to the west of Kullania. Both these countries were subject to Assyria in the days of Amos and the Philistines were intermittently so. (Incidentally this Calneh is not the same as that of Gen. 10.10 which was the Sumerian city-state of Nippur, south-east of Babylon.) Thus the Lord warned Israel of the folly of thinking they could successfully defend themselves against the invaders when more powerful surrounding nations had failed to do so.

The prophet now delivers the message he has for these errant kings and their equally errant nobles and court attendants, all the nobility and rulers of the two lands. *"Ye deem far away the evil day"* he accuses *"and haste to establish violence. Ye who loll on inlaid ivory couches and sprawl on your divans, feasting on choice lambs and fatted calves. Ye who pluck the strings of the lute, composing airs like David himself, lapping wine by the bowl, anointing yourselves with the choicest of ointments, but feel no pain at the afflictions of Joseph. Now, therefore, you shall be first in the procession of exiles. That will be the end of your lounging and revelry"* (ch.6.3-7). A vivid picture of the luxurious opulence of the kings of Judah and Israel, coupled with their complete indifference to their subjects' welfare is given by Jeremiah in his

22nd chapter. He castigates Zedekiah, the last king of the monarchy in very similar terms to that of Amos. Forced labour without pay for the people was the means by which he built his palaces and in them he reclined in comfort and splendour, surrounded by his friends and attendants. He was utterly heedless to the warnings given by the prophet as to the inevitable result of his godless course. It is a striking fact that the last three kings to reign in Jerusalem, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah did so throughout their reigns under the continuous shadow of the Babylonian invasions and constant military presence. Yet they remained heedless of the threat living in luxurious self-indulgence and sublime confidence that all would be well and no enemy would come near them. They put their trust in the various political arrangements and treaties they had made with Egyptians and Babylonians, blind to the fact that all these were as scraps of paper to be torn up when the interests of one or the other of the opposing powers decided to act. The analogy with the political situation of the present day is exact; the same disregard of the obvious is characteristic of many of today's politicians and the same results will assuredly follow. The Lord will allow this just as he did in the days of Amos and Zedekiah for the complete breakdown of Israel's society then and world civil administration now is a preliminary to the establishment of the Messianic rule upon earth which will restore peace and security. It will eliminate evil and institute everlasting righteousness. The Lord allows matters to take their logical course, the while maintaining His overall control of the situation that His ultimate purpose might eventually be achieved. So He says here to Amos, *"The Lord God has sworn by himself, I loathe the arrogance of Jacob"* (Israel) *"I loathe his palaces. Therefore the city and all in it I will abandon to their fate"* (ch 6.8). So ended the kingly dynasty that had ruled in Jerusalem for nearly four centuries. It commenced with King David, *"the man after God's own heart"*, and his son Solomon, to whom the Lord had declared that his dynasty would remain for ever ruling over the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem if his successors on that throne remained loyal to God and the Covenant. In 1 Kings 9.6-7 we have the Lord saying *"But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children and will not keep my*

commandments and my statutes ... Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them and this house (the Temple), which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight". This is what happened at the end.

Yet the original purpose and promise of God that of the seed of David Messiah should come to rule the world, is fulfilled by the workings of Divine Providence. The royal line of David through Solomon became extinct in Jehoiachin, who died in Babylon childless. From the humbler line of Nathan, son of David, was born one who in the days of the Captivity became the legal although not natural son of Jehoiachin by virtue of the Levirate marriage law enunciated by Moses. From him came both Joseph and Mary through two lines of descent, the one royal and the other non-royal. So in both the natural and legal spheres Jesus was the promised seed of David having the right on both counts to assume power as King in Jerusalem. All that is far remote from the message of Amos at this point; it is not until he comes to the end of this prophecy that his vision embraces that distant future when Israel is at last restored to her own land, never again to be plucked up. Before that time can be shown to the people of his own day he has more to say concerning the judgment that must come.

There is now a strange little interlude and one rather difficult to understand, at least until it is viewed against the background of the actual Assyrian invasion of the city, *"And it shall come to pass that if there be ten men left in one house, that they shall die. And a man's kinsman with the embalmer shall take him up to carry his body out of the house for burial and shall call to someone in the corner of the house 'Is there any body left' and he shall answer 'No', He will add 'Be silent for we did not remember the name of the Lord'. For the Lord will command, and every great house shall be smitten into splinters and every little house into chips"*. (Ch. 6.9-11). The picture is that of the wholesale slaughter and looting which inevitably accompanied the capture and sacking of a city. Ten men in one house, all slain and their bodies left lying where they met their deaths. One lone survivor, crouching in a corner unnoticed by the invaders. When the assailants have gone and all is quiet again the kinsmen of the slain come to collect their bodies for burial. The question to the

survivor is *"are there any more with you?"* and they reply *"None"* and *"Be silent, for we did not remember the name of the Lord"*. This is Ferrar Fenton's translation rather than "we may not mention the name of the Lord", and his rendering makes good sense. The shock of the invasion and its consequences has jolted one man into realization of the reason this tragic calamity has come upon them. "This has happened to us because we did not remember the name of the Lord". It is just the beginning of what afterwards, in the distress of resettlement in a strange land, would become a wider spread of repentance and a restoration of loyalty to God. For that is what did happen. Israel, "the Lost Ten Tribes", resettled in Assyrian provinces while Judah, "the Captivity" were in Babylon. "The Captivity" did recover their lost faith and worship, and that faith and worship was maintained through their generations wherever the Israel nation found itself. Among the Ten Tribes their religious faith did die out after four or five centuries and they became largely merged with the native peoples. With Judah it blossomed into the national fervour of the Restoration under Cyrus, when Jerusalem and the Temple were rebuilt and it prospered also among the Jews who remained in Babylon and Persia until at least the Middle Ages of this era. History shows that the lesson was salutary. They never relapsed into idolatry again. Throughout all future centuries and to the present, to whatever extent this people retained and practised religious faith, it was always centred upon one God, the One who formed them into a nation at Sinai under Moses. It is His fixed intention that they will become an instrument in His hand for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

It seems as though Amos has wearied himself with the force of his long-continued denunciation of Israel's sins. His voice drops to a lower key; his vital force seems to have diminished. It appears that after all he has said and all the appeals he has directed to his faithless countrymen he has at last realized there is not going to be any response. *"Can horses gallop up a precipice?"* he asks *"Can the seas be ploughed with oxen?"* (ch. 6.12). Impetuous and strong as a thorough-bred horse, Amos had attempted to scale the precipice of bigotry, enmity and opposition mounted against him by the apostate priesthood and failed. Zealous

and patient as the ploughman with his team of oxen, he had endeavoured to stir up the hearts of the masses, the common people, like the wild seas for multitude - and failed. After all that he had put into his warnings and his appeals, the ones to whom he had been sent made no response. Sadly, he realized that they had no intention of making a response. What was the reason? *"For you have turned into venom the process of law, and justice itself into poison"*. (ch. 6.12). There was no longer any respect for truth and righteousness in the nation and all his words had fallen on deaf ears. There remained but to utter his final word on the situation before closing this, the second section of his prophecy. *"Ye rejoice in that which is of no power and say, have we not won power by our own strength? But, behold I will raise up against you a nation, saith the Lord God and they shall afflict you from the entry of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness"* (ch. 6.13-14).

Bitingly, Amos tells them that in rejecting the power of God which could be theirs for deliverance and protection if only they would believe, they now are claiming that they have a source of power arising from their own strength. "We have no need of God", say they, "we have a source of strength of our own which is sufficient for all our needs". That claimed source of power, says the prophet bitterly, is in fact illusory for there is no power there. They have put their trust in that which has no reality or substance. Their confidence is in a thing of nought, that has no strength to defend or deliver. They will speedily find that out, says the Lord, for He is about to send against them the greatly feared Assyrians. They will ravage the land and denude it of its inhabitants all the way from Hamath on Israel's extreme northern border to the river in the Sinai wilderness, the Wady-el-Arish, which marked Judah's extreme southern border. The entire length and breadth of the land would be desolated and there would be no escape.

At this point Amos concludes the second stanza of his prophecy. The first, comprising chapters 1 and 2, described the Divine judgments soon to fall upon the six surrounding nations and in brief summary, upon Israel and Judah. The second stanza extending over chapters 3 to 6, amplifies the judgment upon Israel and Judah and divides it into those to fall upon the four divisions of the national

society: the military, the social and commercial, the ecclesiastical and the royal. After this comes the third stanza in which Amos, no longer the prophet of condemnation and woe, recounts a series of visions. In these he traces the future

history of Israel until the nation, purified at last, attains its destiny in the new government of earth to be established at the Second Advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

(To be continued)

THE TEL-EL-AMARNA TABLETS

*The Voice of
Archaeology*

In 1887 an old Egyptian peasant woman was working in the fields of Tel-el-Amarna, two hundred miles south of Cairo, when she turned up some inscribed clay tablets that lay buried in the soil. The first ones were disposed of to local antique dealers for a few coins, but it was not long before the scholarly world became aware of the importance of the discovery and systematic excavations began at Tel-el-Amarna. The old woman had unwittingly brought to light the official records of the Egyptian government of the time when Joshua was leading Israel into the Promised Land and the tablets included letters from the kings and governors of the Canaanite cities appealing to Egypt for help against the invading Israelites.

The archaeologists were chiefly interested because this discovery afforded them an opportunity of reading the actual official government correspondence which passed between the kings of Babylon, Assyria, Mesopotamia and Syria on the one hand and Egypt on the other, during the reigns of two Pharaohs, Amenhetep III. who reigned while Israel was in the wilderness and for a few years after they entered Canaan, and Amenhetep IV (Akhnaten, the renowned 'pacifist' Pharaoh) who reigned while they were subduing the Canaanites and dividing the land. The interest for students of Scripture is in what is now called the 'Tel-el-Amarna correspondence' which gives the story of Israel's entry into the Promised Land under Joshua from the standpoint of the other parties, the Canaanites. Canaan was, at that time, an Egyptian province. When Moses looked from the top of Mount Pisgah he saw the goodly land that God had promised to give to His People. It stretched from Dan to Beer-sheba, from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, a land that had for many centuries given political allegiance to the Pharaohs. Egyptian governors resided in many of its cities. Canaanite kings in others paid regular tribute. When Jordan

was 'driven back' and the hosts of Israel surrounded Jericho, it was an Egyptian garrison town that they stormed and destroyed. In harmony with this, much of the 'Tel-el-Amarna correspondence' consists of letters from various notabilities telling Pharaoh of the progress of the invading Israelites and imploring his help for their defence, a help that never came. Egypt was beset with other enemies at that time and Pharaoh preferred to let his possessions in Canaan slip out of his grasp rather than risk sending soldiers for their defence.

That is the scholars' view. There is also the possibility that Amenhetep III remembered only too well the disasters that had come upon his country only forty years previously when his grandfather had said to Moses "*I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go*". Perhaps Pharaoh considered it politic to turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of his apprehensive subjects in Canaan. The God of Israel had already shown that He was not a God to be trifled with. That may conceivably explain why so many letters from Zimrida of Lachish and Yapakhi of Gaza and above all from Abdi-Khiba of Jerusalem pleading for the help that never came, now lie in some of the world's museums, including the British Museum in London.

One letter reports the destruction of Hazor; the Book of Joshua (11.10-14) tells of the same event from the Israelites' standpoint. In another the name of Joshua appears; it is strongly presumed that the great leader of the hosts of Israel is referred to in that letter. The fall of Zelah (Josh. 18.28) is the burden of another letter; time and time again there occur these references to incidents which are recorded in the Book of Joshua, a remarkably independent testimony to the veracity of that wonderful book.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets is the correspondence from

Abdi-Khiba, King of Jerusalem. Many times, in writing to Pharaoh, he mentions the fact that he did not hold his office by virtue of Pharaoh's permission, like the other kings around him, but by decree of the Most High. Neither by his father or his mother, nor by Pharaoh, but by the Most High, he is priest and king of Jerusalem. The mind goes back to Melchizedek, who, six centuries previously, held office in this same city as Priest and King of the Most High God, having neither father nor mother, but abiding a priest continually. Discoveries made in 1929 at Ras Shamra on the Syrian coast have shown that at the time of the Exodus the worship of the 'Most High God' prevailed extensively in Canaan. It might well be that Abdi Khiba was the last of a long line of priest-kings of which Melchizedek may have been the first, or at least an early representative.

Joshua 10 relates how the children of Israel captured and killed Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem. The likeness of the name Adoni-zedek (Lord of righteousness) to Melchizedek, (king of righteousness) is worth noting in passing. If Adoni-zedek of the book of Joshua and Abdi-Khiba of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets were not one and the same person the former must have succeeded upon the death of the latter and then in turn been slain. It is more likely perhaps that they were one and the same. The frantic appeals recorded on those little clay tablets now safely reposing in glass cases came to an abrupt end when the forces of Joshua overtook the five royal fugitives and put an end to the life of Jerusalem's last Priest-King.

Here are a few extracts from some of Abdi-Khiba's letters to Pharaoh. They show to what extremity of fear the native Canaanites were reduced when Joshua was laying waste their land. *"To the*

king my lord,. thus speaks Abdi-Khiba thy servant ... The country of the king is being destroyed, all of it. Hostilities are being carried on against me as far as the mountains of Seir and the city of Gath-Carmel" (Joshua 15.10,55). *"The Hebrews are capturing the fortresses of the king. Not a single governor remains among them to the king my lord; all have perished. Behold Turbaza has fallen in the great gate of the city of Zelah"* (see Joshua 18.28). *"If no troops come this year all the countries of the king my lord will be utterly destroyed ... No provinces remain unto the king; the Hebrews have wasted all the provinces of the king."*

Three letters also illustrate the origin of the name of Jerusalem. That the word means 'city of peace' is well known. Frequently in the Tel-el-Amarna letters it is referred to as the city of the god Salim, and Salim was the Babylonian god of peace. The city of that time had both a strong fortress and a temple. Nothing is mentioned in the Scriptures regarding the temple: it would of course have been a temple to the 'Most High God' but the Israelites probably viewed it as an idolatrous building and made short work of it as soon as they had the opportunity. It was many years later that they really occupied Jerusalem: in the meantime it was held by the Jebusites for a while and in Joshua 18.16,28 it is called Jebusi. Perhaps, the saddest feature of Tel-el-Amarna letters is the revelation they make of the noble worship of the 'Most High God'. In Abraham's time Melchizedek was Priest and King, a 'priest on his throne' and this had degenerated in the time of Joshua to an idolatrous faith which retained nothing of its former glory but the name. Abraham paid tithes to the first, "priest of the Most High God"; Joshua slew the last.

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THE EXODUS

A series intended to help younger readers discover the Bible.

2. Dates and Times

The first two chapters of Exodus cover the period between the death of Joseph and Moses' eightieth year. The latter was a shepherd in Midian when he received God's call to return and lead Israel to the 'Promised Land'. The events of this period include the birth of Moses, his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter, his forty years at the royal court and forty more in Midian. All this was against a background of the Israelites being oppressed by the Egyptians.

The length of the period that Israel lived in Egypt is a matter of debate and is not settled beyond all possible doubt. Logical deductions from the Bible show that it was either a period of 215 or 430 years. The latter figure is stated in Exodus in the Authorised Version where there are arguments that are against the generally accepted reading of the text. Recent progress in our knowledge of Egyptian history has thrown light upon the subject.

Exodus does not name Egyptian kings nor give details which can be matched easily with historical data. Reference is made (1.8) to a "new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph" who became an oppressor and to Pharaoh's daughter, but there are no names given. Several places are mentioned such as Pithom, Raamses, Succoth and Elim but founding dates of these towns are either not known with sufficient certainty or they go back too far in history to give us guidance. Correlation of the Bible narrative with discovered history is all that yields basis for conclusions.

Several chronological indications exist. *"The Israelites had been settled in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years. At the end of the four hundred and thirty years to the very day, all the tribes of Israel came out of Egypt."* (Exodus 12. 40-41 REV).

"My point is this: a testament or covenant had already been validated by God; a law made four hundred and thirty years later cannot invalidate it" (Gal. 3.17 REV). The law was given three months after the Exodus but Paul here dates the commencement of the four hundred and thirty years not at the entry into Egypt but from the covenant with Abraham some two centuries earlier.

"The LORD said to Abram, 'Know this for certain: your descendants will be aliens living in a land that is not their own; they will be enslaved and

held in oppression four hundred years... it will be the fourth generation who will return here..'" (Gen. 15. 13-16 REV).

"This is what God said, 'Abraham's descendants shall live as aliens in a foreign land, held in slavery and oppression for four hundred years.'" (Acts 7.6). Stephen is here quoting from the Genesis reference. "It was in the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel... he began to build the house of the Lord. (1 Kings 6.1 REV). "Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt" (Num. 13.22 REV).

There is a fundamental difference between the Masoretic text on which the Authorised Version is based and the two great versions, the Septuagint and the Samaritan. The latter renders Exodus 12.40 *"Now the sojourning of the children of Israel and of their fathers which they sojourned in the land of Canaan and in the land of Egypt was four hundred and thirty years."* This may include in the period of 'sojourning', the years Israel (Jacob), Isaac and Abraham, and the place of 'sojourning' covers Canaan as well as Egypt. It depends who is meant by 'the fathers'. The Alexandrian Septuagint has the same rendering and the Vatican Septuagint has "in the land of Canaan" but omits "and of their fathers". Since the Septuagint was the version in common use in the days of Paul, he probably used it in his application of Exodus 12.40 to the period from the covenant with Abraham to the Exodus. It is true that the patriarchs were strangers and sojourners in the land of Canaan (Gen 23.4; Gen 47.9; Heb. 11.13) so that the Septuagint and Samaritan versions are reasonable.

Genesis 15.13-16 already quoted is equally ambiguous. It seems to predict four hundred years' of oppression in Egypt during which period there would be only four generations. Stephen at his trial used this text, expressing it more emphatically. It must be noted that the 'oppression' cannot be extended to four centuries. The early years in Egypt were spent in prosperity under the favour of the reigning Pharaohs. It was only after the death of Joseph and his generation, at least nearly another century after the settlement in Egypt, that the king appeared who didn't know Joseph and the oppression began. Therefore many scholars feel the four

hundred years does not relate directly to the 'oppression' but the entire period of time of Israel in Egypt. Since there were 25 years between God making the promise to Abraham and the birth of Isaac; 60 years before the birth of Jacob and 130 years of Jacob's age in going to Egypt, there are 215 years left for the exile in Egypt.

It was once thought that the Exodus took place in the 19th Egyptian dynasty and that Pharaoh of the oppression was Rameses II (1301-1234BC). His son Merneptah would then be the one under whom the Exodus took place. It is now known that the Israelites were well established by the time of Merneptah and many investigators relate the events of Exodus to the 18th dynasty. Thothmes III (1501-1447BC) would then be the Pharaoh of the oppression and his son Amenhetep II (1447-1423BC) the king who was forced to 'let the people go'. Prof. Garstang's investigation at Jericho confirmed that the Exodus took place about 1440BC. This is further confirmed by the statement in 1 Kings 6.1 that the Exodus was 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon's reign (c961BC).

The move of Joseph and Jacob to Egypt could be indicated by the Semitic Hyksos invasion of lower Egypt (c1670BC). They were expelled by native Egyptian warrior kings about 1570BC. This would seem to indicate that Israel's period in Egypt was about two centuries. One further clue appears in Numbers 14.22 concerning the building of Hebron and Zoan which is the Old Testament name for the Hyksos capital in Egypt. This is the historical city of Tanis, a fortified city in the eastern Nile delta near the sea. To this city from which the Hyksos ruled Egypt, Joseph would have been brought as a slave and in which he later rose to power. It was the city to which the sons of Jacob came to buy corn and around which they later settled in Goshen. It is believed that the first Hyksos Pharaoh built Tanis about 1675BC. If this is so, Hebron was built about 1683BC. It would appear from Gen. 13.18 and 23.19 that the town was not there in Abraham's day but the area was known as the 'Plains of Mamre'. Later still it was known as Kirjath-Arba, and each time its ancient name is given, it is followed by 'which is Hebron.' The change came between Jacob returning from Haran, the home of uncle Laban and Joseph going out to meet his brothers from which he never returned. Were the wealthy father and son, Isaac and Jacob, the builders of Hebron? It is not a Canaanite name

and at least that is the period when it was built. Tanis or Zoan was founded seven years later which was certainly not much more than two centuries before Amenhetep II watched Israel leave Egypt.

It may be objected that 70 people could not multiply to about two and a half million in just over two centuries. The retinue of Jacob going to Egypt must have numbered many more than seventy. Their flocks and herds would have demanded many servants and slaves. Marrying and intermarriage into the boss's family was not unlikely. Principles of population growth rate are dependent on death rate as well as birth rate and the consequent number of generations alive simultaneously. Conditions were very different from those of today and their life expectancy was at least up to 140 years. Evidence of this exists in Egyptian records as well as in the Hebrew Scriptures. Individual fertility span was probably much longer and as many as seven generations could have been living at any one time. During the period that Jacob and family lived in Canaan, it is clear that Judah had grandsons as well as sons. Polygamy was common. If it is calculated that Israel began in Egypt with 60 couples and each generation began married life at about 20 years old, producing on average 10 children with a life span of 100 years, at the end of 215 years they could easily have become much more than four million people.

When there is a wide age range within a family, 'aunts and uncles' can be the same age or younger than their 'nieces and nephews' even in modern times. Within the space of a hundred years or so, some in the fifth generation can be as old as distant cousins of the third generation. In an ancient population, where the child bearing span was longer, these generation differences become much greater. This may explain three points. Firstly, that the words of Genesis 15.16 that there will only be four generations till Abraham's descendants are released from Egypt is reasonable. Secondly, that some of the marital relationships of the Exodus-Judges period that seem at first sight to be mixed up generations are in fact quite logical. Thirdly, it shows why Bezaleel was sixth in descent from Judah while Achan living at the same time was only fourth.

It is against that background of dates, time spans and generations that we shall pursue the liberation of Israel under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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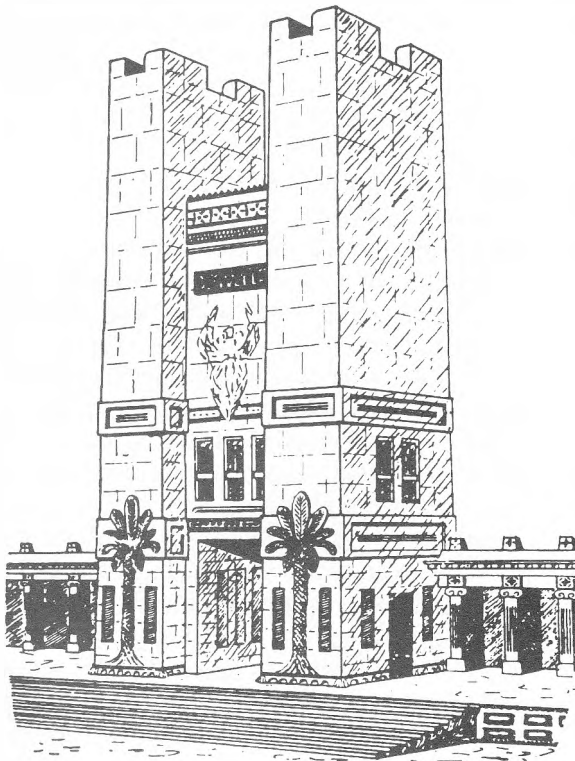
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

"You study the Scriptures diligently, supposing that in having them you have eternal life; their testimony points to me." (John 5.39 REB). In what is recorded here Jesus did not conclusively say that study was a good activity although that could easily be implied. The Jewish leaders believed that eternal life was theirs by right as descendants of Abraham and in obedience to God's Law given through Moses. There is evidence enough in Deuteronomy that the people of Israel were told to become very familiar with their Scriptures. That was God's command; and they were to remember them as they came in and went out and at their meal time in the family circle.

Their study was not to prepare them for a public academic examination, nor was it to make them skilled in the art of debate so that they could score debating points off their opponents. It was to give them a clear understanding of what God wanted from them. It was to make their lives fruitful so that they could testify of God's goodness to those who didn't know about it.

In the record of John 5, Jesus didn't deny that 'searching the Scriptures' was a good activity. From the record of His temptations and from His teaching ministry it is clear that He had an excellent knowledge of the Word of God. He called it the precious seed that the Sower went forth to sow. When Paul went through Macedonia preaching about Jesus as the Messiah he came to the city Beroea about which Luke comments that the Jews were *"more noble than those in Thessalonica for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so"*. (Acts 17.11 RSV) Prof. Bruce comments *"with commendable open-mindedness they brought the claims made by Paul to the touchstone*

of Holy Writ instead of giving way to prejudice."

An accurate translation of Paul's words to Timothy (2 Tim. 2.15) appear to be the NIV, *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth"*. It is an interesting text not only because it is difficult to translate but in the interpretation of it. A workman might be ashamed that he hasn't done his best but has been slothful, careless and failed to produce work worthy of his skills and of the purpose for which the work was done.

The Scriptures are worth studying, however limited our tools and skills may seem to be. Whatever activity we pursue, it is worth studying to discover what other people have accumulated in knowledge and experience. If we want to become good at producing food we study farming or gardening. If we want to drive a motor car well, we study what people have written about 'advanced driving'. If we are really involved in sport we might read about how others have reached the top in their field or study the biology of the human body. In the world of work and play, these are 'norms'. Why should we do less in serving the Lord God, our Heavenly Father. All animal life does some form of learning. Life is a voyage of discovery. Achievement is only reached by learning. Let us make learning about the Scriptures an exciting activity that leads to godly living. Let us also make it a challenge to our preconceived ideas and to overcoming the difficulties in life. It can only be done successfully through constant prayer and by the power of the Holy Spirit and it will only be worthwhile if it brings us nearer to God and to His dear Son.

JOSHUA'S PASSOVER

"And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho." (Joshua 5.10)

A year to be remembered; the year of entering into the land! Full forty years had they wandered in the vast wasteland of the howling desert. They had been scorched by day and frozen by night, afflicted by dangers and perils innumerable, until it must have seemed that God had quite forgotten them. But now it was all over; the trials and tribulations of the day were ended, the river lay behind them and they were in the Promised Land. Now all was going to be well with them.

Of course it did not turn out to be like that and we who read about these happenings of old know full well that even now, thirty-four centuries later, Israel still *"hath not obtained that which he seeketh for"*. However, for the time being we are going to limit our vision to that of Israel at the time of crossing Jordan. We will share with them in that Passover which Joshua commanded them to celebrate directly they set foot on the soil of the Promised Land. We shall seek the spiritual teaching that lies behind the momentous feast which marked the end, as the first Passover marked the beginning, of their pilgrimage.

It is probable that there had been no Passover for forty years before this. Only the circumcised could partake (Exodus 12.48) and none save those who came out of Egypt had been circumcised. During the long period of wandering to which the people had been condemned because of their unbelief and lack of faith at the time of the sending of the twelve spies, they had not troubled to circumcise their children (Joshua 5.5). In consequence, now that the wanderings were ended, none under forty years of age were circumcised. This flagrant disregard of the central feature of the covenant is a matter of wonder and one is tempted to ask why Moses and Aaron were apparently so lax in their administration during that forty years. It is a question that cannot be answered. We know that Israel kept the Passover at Sinai one year after leaving Egypt. After that there is no certainty until the children of Israel have crossed Jordan and Joshua is commanding them all to be circumcised in order that they keep the Passover in the land. It

may well have been that a few of the more devout did bring up their children in the desert in the nurture and fear of the Lord, circumcising them the eighth day and sharing with them in the annual feasts and 'holy convocation' and that the rest were indifferent. The energies of Moses and Aaron and the few who laboured with them must have been entirely spent in the heavy task of controlling the general destinies of this mighty host of nearly three million people; it would have been a physical impossibility to ensure the individual 'orthodoxy' of everyone and if the solemn feasts were observed at all it was probably by the minority. For all practical purposes therefore it may be assumed that there was no national Passover celebration during the thirty-nine years that elapsed between Sinai and Jericho.

There were, then, three great Passover celebrations in the history of Israel's journey to the Promised Land. First came that in Egypt, at the time of their departure from the dominion of Pharaoh. Next came that at Sinai, when they entered into covenant with God and became a royal priesthood and separated people. Finally came that in Canaan, after they had crossed Jordan and had actually entered into their inheritance. It is impossible not to see in this a striking resemblance to the course of the Christian Church and also of each individual believer. The first great event in the journey from 'Egypt' to 'Canaan' is Justification. That comes to us after we have believed but before we have left the world. In the darkness of this world's night we have light in our hearts; the sprinkled blood ensures our acceptance in God's sight and our deliverance from the condemnation that is in the world. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."* Justification by faith is an indispensable preliminary to our entering the wilderness journey which will lead us to the heavenly Canaan, just as that first Passover must of necessity be accepted and eaten before any Israelite could cross the Red Sea and escape from Egypt.

Twelve months later Israel was at Sinai, and the second Passover was observed. There they entered into a solemn covenant with God which made them a consecrated people separated from the world and dedicated to the purposes of God for all

time. Natural Israel has been a separated people ever since. Not even their own faithlessness and shortcoming has altered that. Though they have denied Him repeatedly, yet He has been faithful and the mark of Sinai remains on Israel still. That is a fitting picture of the second great step in the Christian's progress, Consecration. The second Passover, associated as it was with the making of the Covenant, is paralleled in our case by our own entering into a 'covenant by sacrifice'. Like Israel of old at Sinai, we too have become members of a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Like Israel, the making of that covenant with God is only the beginning, not the ending of our wilderness journey. Israel spent something like three months getting from Egypt to Sinai. After about nine months at the mountain they spent another thirty-nine years travelling to Canaan. Most of that time, dwelling in Kadesh, on its borders, waiting for all the adults who left Egypt to pass into death according to the Divine decree (Numbers 14.29-34). The spiritual is a true likeness of the material. We come to the issue of consecrating very soon after justification but there is a lifetime of learning the lessons God would teach us before we enter the Land of Promise, the heavenly Canaan. Like Israel at Kadesh, we dwell for a long time almost within sight of the golden land, yet we are rigidly excluded from its joys until all that is of the old nature, of 'Egypt', is consumed and replaced by that which is born in the desert of our 'wilderness experiences'. It is then, and only then, that God says to us, as Moses did to Israel "*Ye have compassed this mountain long enough; turn you northward*" and we come to the final phase of life's experiences, the crossing of Jordan.

The Psalmist expressed these sentiments in a manner that is wonderfully applicable to the experience of the Church, when in Psalm 107 (4-7) he allowed his thoughts to roam over this sojourn in Kadesh. "*Hungry and thirsty*" he said of Israel "*Their soul fainted in them, they wandered in the wilderness, they found no city to dwell in. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and ... He led them forth by the right way*". It must be confessed that he rather idealised Israel at the time for they were in Kadesh as punishment for their unbelief. But, even so, the picture is that of a

loving and all-wise Father who understands the delinquencies of His erring children and is solicitous for their welfare even whilst He must chastise them for their own ultimate good. So it is with the Lord's followers now. In so many ways do we come short of His glory and the ideal He has set before us, and He understands and sympathises and despite our failures brings us at last to our desired haven. They rebelled against the word of God, says the Psalmist, and ignored His exhortations and so they fell down into the darkness of uncertainty and doubt; yet He brought them up out of the darkness and set their feet upon the right road again. In so many ways these failures of Israel are repeated in our own lives, but He delivers. "*O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and his wonderful works to the children of men*" is his triumphant refrain. So in the end, after all the shortcomings and stumbling and deviation from the way, the people of the Lord come into that "afterward of peace" to which He has been guiding them all the time. The Psalm ends with the Divine counsel "*Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.*"

Meanwhile, we do well to remember that 'Kadesh' means '**holy**' and that is where the Israelites spent at least thirty-seven of their forty years of wandering. Whatever the condition in which our Lord has seen fit to leave us as we seek to make our calling and election sure, no matter how often we seem to fail in our profession, it is a condition which in His sight is '**holy**' because it is there that we are being fitted for the glory of His presence 'in due time'.

So then at last like Joshua's hosts, we cross Jordan into Canaan, and immediately partake of our third Passover, our Glorification. For Israel it was glorification in a material sense; they had arrived in the Promised Land after long years of wandering and now God would be always with them. For us it is the same; we shall enter into His Presence where there is fulness of joy, taking our place beside that right hand where there are pleasures forevermore.

Justification, Consecration, Glorification. These three steps in the Christian's life and progress are well foreshadowed in the three great Passovers associated with Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan. The story of the third one yields

further analogies for our instruction.

This Passover was different from the two previous ones. *"They did eat of the old corn of the land.... And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."* (Joshua 5. 11-12) Throughout the forty long years of Israel's necessity, from Elim to Gilgal, the Red Sea and to Jordan, the departure from Egypt to the entry into Canaan, the manna came consistently and regularly. It never failed *"He gave them bread from heaven; man did eat angel's food"* sang the Psalmist many years later. But on the day of that Jordan Passover the manna ceased, for the people began to eat of the fruit of the land.

So it is with us. While yet we linger on this side the Vail, the spiritual manna of our Lord's providing will be our constant portion. It began just so soon as we turned our backs upon Egypt and began to walk in the ways of the Lord. It will continue without ever failing until the very moment we cross Jordan and need it no more. There will be a day when we shall drink of the fruit of the vine, new, in the kingdom of our Father. We shall not need the manna then.

Joshua's Passover must have been a wonderful time of rejoicing. The first Passover was one of gladness at the thought of deliverance from Egypt but it must have been mingled with some apprehension of the unknown, some fears of the difficulties and dangers awaiting them in the desert. The second Passover would have brought a certain holy joy mingled with solemnity at the thought of the covenant and all its privileges, but again there would be the knowledge that endurance and toil would be demanded of all who would reap the reward of that covenant. The third Passover was different. All the hardships and dangers were past, all the fears and apprehensions dispelled. God

had brought them into **their** land and now all would be well. *"The Lord hath done great things for us; we are glad."*

So it will be with us. Our first Passover of Justification, our second Passover of Consecration involve much of hardship and testing of faith. They call for determination and endurance. Oft will we fall by the wayside and picking ourselves up we continue in the way pointed out for us by the guiding cloud. The third Passover of Glorification is the attainment of our goal and of our heart's desire. As we sometimes sing in our services of praise, *"The toils of the road will seem nothing, When I come to the end of the way"*. So Paul writes in 2 Cor. 4.17 (RSV) *"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison"*.

The golden dream did not last long for Israel, for they were still living in history and faith soon failed. Unbelief returned instead of enjoying the land as a free gift from the Almighty that would have been their portion had their faith held. With that development we are not concerned. With Joshua's Passover the picture afforded by the wilderness journey is completed and the curtain falls. Israel's subsequent experiences in the land yield other pictures and teach other lessons with which we, at the moment, are not concerned. Suffice it that we, at the Passover season, take fresh courage from the pageantry of Israel's journeying of olden time. We reflect that just as they entered their Promised Land at last, so we, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, will receive that inheritance promised to us and reserved in heaven for us. We have lived on the manna for many a long year and we shall sustain our lives by its aid for a while yet. The day will assuredly come when we shall gather together without the manna, for we shall indeed eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

Internet BFU currently has no e-mail address and has no plans to put the BSM and its literature on internet. Readers in several countries are apparently using BFU material at their own 'web-site'. We remain very interested in what is going on and have available the equipment to commence operations in this matter but not sufficient time. We quietly await the Lord's leading.

Publication of articles in the Bible Study Monthly is done in good faith that they are of value in the Christian life and teaching. We hope and pray that each issue will contain items of interest and help to all readers. The inclusion of an article in this magazine does not necessarily mean that the editor agrees with every opinion expressed.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

Part 2

*Genealogies,
The Isaiah Prophecy,
Early Church Teaching*

The Genealogies

The two genealogies, one in Matthew's Gospel and the other in Luke's, pose an interesting problem (Matt. 1.1-16; Luke 3.23-38). These need examination, although not in full, because that would involve much more than is relevant to the present subject but to the extent that they describe the natural descent of Jesus. The genealogy in Matthew is that of Joseph and in Luke that of Mary. These two lines coincide in Zerubbabel, prince and governor of Judah at the time of the Restoration from Babylon. From Zerubbabel the line in Matthew goes through Salathiel and the kings of Judah to Solomon and thence David but in Luke it goes through another and non-royal line to Nathan, Solomon's brother and so to David. The Divine sentence upon Jechoniah, the last king of Judah, was that he should die childless and no seed of his would ever rule in Judah. It is evident that Salathiel was not his natural son but the result of a marriage under Levirate law in which the nearest relative became the father of a son who was then legally credited to the childless monarch. Thus Zerubbabel, the grandson of Neariah of the line of Nathan, succeeded to the royal title of Jechoniah the last king of Judah and the kingly line was reckoned to be continued through him, although the monarchy had lapsed. Hence both Joseph and Mary, natural descendants of Nathan, could lay claim to royal pedigree. It is for this reason that Joseph, legally in the male line from the kings of Judah, and in the eyes of the law the official or legal father of Jesus, could claim the succession to David's throne. Actual blood descent from the Judean kings was not essential any more than in the case of Salathiel and Zerubbabel some twenty generations earlier. It is true, however, that in the official records, which according to some authorities were maintained in the Temple, Joseph would have been entered as the father of Jesus.

On this basis Matthew records the matter at the end of his genealogy thus (1.16) "*and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ*". The "*of whom*" here is feminine gender in the Greek, referring to Mary, so that although in the preceding

fifteen verses the formula is consistently '**father begat son**' this formula ends with '*Jacob begat Joseph*'. It does **not** go on to say '*Joseph begat Jesus*' as would be the case if Matthew intended to assert Joseph's paternity. He says that Jesus was born of Mary but he does not say that Joseph was the father.

Some of the Latin versions of later centuries have at this point a variation to the effect that Joseph begat Jesus, but although there has been argument on this ground there is no real reason for thinking that the original Greek was materially different from the Received Text. An early Syriac version, the Sinai Palimpsest, has it "Joseph" to whom was betrothed Mary the virgin who begat Jesus" but another, the Curetonian Syriac renders it "Jacob who begat Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the virgin, who begat Jesus". Canon R.H.Charles, a leading early 20th century authority has concluded that the original Greek text probably was "Jacob begat Joseph, to whom was betrothed the virgin Mary, and she begat Jesus". This would be more accurately "gave birth to Jesus" since the Greek word here is the passive voice and when it means 'beget' it is normally in the active.

It might be appropriate here to point out that the statement sometimes encountered to the effect that scientists have proved the possibility of virgin birth and can explain the precise manner in which Jesus came into the world is not strictly accurate. It is true that, biologically a virgin birth is possible among the higher animals and presumably among humans also, and has actually taken place under laboratory conditions with some animals. In such cases, which are very rare, the female cell is 'triggered' into action and development without the participation of a male cell and can in theory proceed to full birth so that the offspring has a mother but no father; this is a biological virgin birth. It has to be noted however that such a process can only produce a female child because whereas the father can contribute either male or female sex-determining chromosomes, the mother can only contribute female ones. This leads to the very important conclusion that the virgin birth of

our Lord was not what the biologists mean by a virgin birth and cannot be explained by any discoveries which have been made in this field. There is no escape from the conclusion that whereas Mary was a perfectly normal woman, there was a factor in her conception that was due to the direct and miraculous intervention of God.

The testimony of Luke is to the same effect. He says (Luke 3. 23 RSV) "*Jesus when he began his ministry was about thirty years of age, being the son, (as was supposed) of Joseph, son of Heli*" The word 'supposed' here means exactly what it says, that Jesus was generally assumed to be the son of Joseph and this obviously must have been the position. Luke would not have said this had Jesus actually been the son of Joseph. The same word for 'supposed' appears in 1 Cor. 7.26; 1 Tim. 6.5; Matt. 20.10; Luke 2.44; from which texts the meaning can be readily seen. He then takes the genealogy through Mary's forebears who were the true lineal, or as we would say blood ancestors of Jesus. English translations tend to confuse the issue here by using the expression "the son of" throughout the genealogy, for which there is no warrant in the Greek. They appear to declare that Joseph was the son of Heli, the father of Mary. In fact the Greek reads like a family tree, "of Heli, of Matthat so that Heli, his grandfather, is marked out as his immediate male forefather. Mary his mother, as a woman, is omitted and there is a passing reference made to the popular but incorrect general supposition that Joseph was his father.

Thus the New Testament is consistent in the assertion that Joseph was not the father of Jesus and that Mary conceived not in the normal physical manner but by virtue of an exercise of Divine power. Matthew and Luke were both aware of these facts; one obtained his information from Joseph and the other from Mary. Apart from any local comment that there may have been at the time of Jesus' birth nothing was known of the circumstances outside the family. The disciples may or may not have known of it from Matthew but in general Jesus was considered the natural son of Joseph. It was not until the circulation of Matthew and Luke's Gospels, or such preliminary documents as may have formed the foundations of those Gospels, was the truth of the matter generally known. From then onwards the virgin

birth of Christ became a basic belief of the Christian Church.

The Isaiah Prophecy

Some difference of opinion exists as to the relevance of the prediction in Isaiah 7.14 to the birth of Jesus. Matthew quotes the verse and cites the event as its fulfilment. "*Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel*" (Matt. 1.22-23). It is very frequent practice of Matthew to quote Old Testament passages as predicting incidents in his Gospel, and sometimes it is fairly obvious that he is not really claiming his quotations as specific fulfilment but merely illustrative of the incident under discussion. The controversy over this particular application by Matthew arises from the fact that the Isaiah passage is very difficult to dissociate from its immediate context and fit into a Messianic setting. The birth of the child to the virgin in Isaiah is intimately connected with the political happenings of the day and the immediate relations of Isaiah himself with King Ahaz. It is also argued that the Hebrew *almah* in Isaiah 7.14 means equally a virgin or a young woman of marriageable age so that the prophecy does not necessarily demand a virgin birth and this is true. The Greek Septuagint, though has *parthenos* in this text, which word means virgin simply and solely, although some second and third century fragmentary versions of the Septuagint have *neanis*, which means young woman. The fact that Matthew uses *parthenos* in his quotation would appear to indicate that this was the accepted rendering in his day (the Septuagint was the version at that time in general use). It is evident that Matthew understood it in this manner and this, at any rate, confirms that he intended to assert the reality of the virgin birth. It is this factor which is of importance; the precise interpretation of Isaiah 7.14 is not so relevant. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth rests upon the actual happening as recorded in the New Testament and not upon the application of Old Testament prophecy.

Early Church Testimony

As the Apostolic Age ended and the pastoral care of the Early Church passed into the hands of the Apostle's successors the fact that Jesus was born of a virgin was well understood and accepted.

The extant writings of a dozen or more of these men contain many references to the fact, and it is evident that the Gospel narratives were accepted as literally true. Some of them, such as Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch from AD70 to 107, were personally acquainted with some of the Apostles and there is no question of gullible men accepting wonderful stories of old, founded on tradition and legend. They had actual conversation with the disciples who knew these things to be true and by such means the truth of the birth of Jesus was impressed upon the growing Church and became part of its theological heritage. An evidence of this is afforded by what is believed to be the first "creed" to be formulated, the precursor of the 'Apostles' Creed', devised by the Church of Rome about AD100. The relevant passage runs "I believe in Jesus Christ who was born of the Holy Spirit and of Mary the Virgin".

The fact that Jesus did not come into the public eye until thirty years of age and that the only records of His early life surround His birth and the Temple visit at 12 years old, has no bearing upon the subject, although the contrary is sometimes suggested. Mary and Joseph knew the truth and they imparted it to Luke and Matthew at the least. Mark and John commence their accounts with the beginning of Jesus' ministry at thirty years of age, so no place for the facts of his birth exists, but that does not mean they were ignorant of them. The statement in John 1.13 "*Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God*" is normally taken to refer to the "sons of God" of v. 12 who have experienced the new birth and this is supported by most manuscripts. In the Second Century however, there was evidently an alternative reading current, for many of the early writers quote this verse in the singular "Who was born..." and refer it to Christ, who is the main subject of the chapter. Tertullian, Irenaeus, Ignatius, Justin Martyr and Hippolytus among others, seem to have read the text thus. John's thesis in this chapter would then argue that the Light, the Logos or the Word of God came into the world and the world did not receive him but those who did receive him became sons of God. He came miraculously, not begotten in an earthly manner by the will of the flesh or the will of man, a human

husband, but of God. Thus the Word became flesh and we beheld his glory. It has been remarked that had John meant "the will of man" in a generic sense he would have written *anthropon* (as in 2 Peter 1.21) whereas he actually used the *andros* which means a particular man or a husband. This strengthens the case for the variant understanding of this text. Griesbach, the German theologian whose profound knowledge of New Testament origins laid the foundation of modern textual criticism, supported this translation. It might well be therefore that despite the present Received Text on which the AV is based, John did indeed reveal his knowledge of the virgin birth when he wrote these words.

Paul does not refer to the matter directly although it has been suggested that when in Gal. 4.4 he said "*God sent forth his son, made of a woman*" he was alluding to Jesus' birth from the woman to the exclusion of the man. The word 'made' could equally well be translated 'born'. It would seem rather superfluous for Paul to have described Jesus as being 'made' or 'born' from a woman when that is the method by which all come into the world, unless he was alluding to the fact that the One he is speaking of, came into the world, as the Son of God and the son of the woman, alone.

There the case must rest. When all is said and done, the personal written testimony of Matthew and Luke, contemporary with the people most closely concerned and writing of what they know to be the fact, is all that matters. The preservation of the records by the overruling power of God for the enlightenment and instruction of succeeding generations through two thousand years is a guarantee of their truth. This is a matter in which the powers of heaven, the spiritual world, are closely involved, therefore it cannot be expected that a scientific rational explanation by which these happenings could be defined in everyday human terms can be found. That in no way invalidates the credibility of the story. When we have gone as far as human intellect can go in trying to understand the mystery of the virgin birth we are still unable to improve upon the triumphant words of the beloved apostle. "*The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of an only Son from the Father.*"

Our Lord has written the promise of the Resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf of Spring-time.
(Luther)

OUR HIGH PRIEST

*Thoughts about Jesus from
the Letter to the Hebrews*

"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every way, so that he might be merciful and faithful as their high priest before God." (Hebrews 2.17 REV)

The book of Hebrews is a book of contrasts. In Hebrews 5.6-11 we have one of these contrasts in which Christ is set forth as the priest greater than Aaron, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. This is a quotation from Psalm 110.4 which reads *"You are a priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek"* and follows verse 1, *"The LORD says to My Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"* (NEB). Quite obviously this psalm refers to Christ after His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand. The same period is referred to in Hebrews 1.6 *"Let all God's angels worship him"* (Psa. 97.7). When Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees He took the very words of this Psalm and applied them to Himself (Matt. 22.42-46). The whole of Hebrews chapter 5 deals with the contrast between Aaron, the High Priest of the Levitical order and Christ as the Melchizedek priest.

In verse 7 the writer shows how Christ qualified to become this great priest and king. *"During the days of Jesus' life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and he was heard because of his reverent submission."* This refers to His life among men and particularly to that period when He was developing as the future Priest between Jordan and Calvary. From beginning to end, His life was one of prayer and He sometimes spent all night in prayer. Prayer is many sided. It is worship and adoration, communion and fellowship, petition, supplication and intercession. Jesus often supplicated the Father on behalf of others but we have only the one record of supplicating on behalf of Himself which suggests that this is specially applicable to the agony He was passing through in Gethsemane, when with *"strong crying and tears"* He prayed to the Father that if it were possible this cup might pass from Him. Just how strong was this crying we cannot know but an idea is given when it says that *"His sweat was as it were great drops of blood"*. The phrase *"Unto him that was able to save him from*

death" has alternative translations by Weymouth and Williams supported by Marshall's Greek/English interlinear which have of *"out of death"* and the REV is perhaps even clearer with *"was able to deliver him from death"*. The whole object of His coming to this earth and becoming bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh was that He might go into death and pay the penalty for sin. This was to release Adam and all his race from the dreadful consequence of sin, namely death. The fate of the whole human family rested on Him, and the question would arise in His mind, *"Have I been faithful in carrying out the Father's will, so that I may be able thus to redeem the race?"* According to the Book of Revelation, until that time no one had been found worthy to open the book and to loose its seals. Three times Matthew records that He prayed the same words *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass me by. Yet not my will but yours"*, (26.39 REB) Before He prayed He spoke to the three disciples, Peter, James and John, saying *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death"*. So He knew that **death** was before Him. Luke alone of the evangelists records the dreadful agony that He passed through in the garden of Gethsemane, when the account says *"And in anguish of spirit he prayed the more urgently; and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground"* (22.4 REB). None of the Gospels record that He shed tears at this particular time, though it is quite possible and reasonable to think that He did. There are only two recorded instances of Jesus weeping; one was at the grave of Lazarus and the other when He wept over Jerusalem. Tears as a rule come as a relief when one is in great distress of mind so if He wept in Gethsemane it would only be natural.

"... To God who was able to deliver him from death." Death could not hold Him as it holds the human family except in the sense that He was the substitute for Adam, for He who knew no sin was made the sin-bearer for Adam and all in him. So He had to commit His cause and life itself into the hands of His Father who alone was able to raise Him out of death. We read in Ephesians 1.19, 20 that it took the mighty power of God to raise Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand.

So on the cross; *"Jesus called out with a loud voice 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit'"*.

*"Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Saviour,
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord.
Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Saviour
God tore the bars away, for Jesus my Lord.*

*Up from the grave He arose
With a might triumph o'er His foes
He arose a victor from the dark domain
And he lives forever with his saints to reign
He arose, He arose, Hallelujah Christ arose.*

"And he was heard because of his reverent submission" (NIV). The word 'feared' in the AV is variously translated by others. REB has 'devotions' while Marshall's interlinear says 'because of his devoutness'. Moffatt has *"heard because of his godly fear"*. There is difficulty in translating this but it is evident that He was heard. Only Luke records that *"An angel appeared from heaven and strengthened him"*. At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus lifted up His eyes and said *"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me ..."* (John 11.41,42 NIV). It is one thing to have our prayer heard by God and another thing to have it answered in the way that we desire. The important thing is that like Jesus, we say from the heart *"Not my will but yours be done"*. There was a great deal included in that prayer to His Father. That He was to die He knew, but was death not enough, He might reason, to pay the ransom price, without all the dreadful suffering of mind and body that was attached to such a painful death as that of the cross? Was it necessary that He should bear all that terrible shame and all that lay between Gethsemane and Calvary? There was to be the mocking, the spitting, the crown of thorns so cruel and painful, the nails in His hands and feet, and the spear wound in His side, an exhibition to all who passed by. All this besides the denial of Peter with curses, the forsaking by all the disciples and the betrayal by one. All these trials must have weighed heavily upon Him, for being a perfect man, He would feel these things much more than an imperfect individual. If He visualised all He had to go through in His mind, what about His final test on the cross when He cried *"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* Did He expect this, or did it come as a surprise to Him? To have all His disciples

forsake Him was bad enough but His Father; why? One wonders if this was before Him when He prayed in Gethsemane that the cup might pass from Him. These were the very words recorded in Psalm 22.1. No doubt Jesus knew that they applied to Him, as did many other verses in that Psalm.

A lesson we can take to ourselves in this prayer of our Lord is, that like Him we can say *"Father I know that you hear me always. You may in wisdom not answer my prayer the way I would like, but since you know what is best for my interest and highest good I leave the answering to you"*. Paul, who three times asked for the thorn in his flesh to be removed received the answer *"My grace is all you need, power is most fully seen in weakness"*. His prayer was answered in a different way from that which might be expected when he asked.

Another comfort we can take from this verse is that God has promised that He will never forsake us; as one translation has it *"I will never, never leave you, I will never, never let go of your hand"*. Again in words of Isaiah (43.2) *"When you pass through the water I will be with you; when you pass through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you."*

Verse 8: *"Though he were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which he suffered"* Weymouth says *"Although he were God's Son"*. The things that He suffered reached their consummation in those experiences He went through in Gethsemane and on the Cross. Besides all that, He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself in an unfriendly world, with imperfection all around Him, unbelief amongst His nearest and dearest and often misunderstood. To think that these were the people He had come to save! He suffered in all those ways but He suffered most as Paul puts it in writing to the Philippians (2.8) when *"He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"*.

Verse 9: *"And being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."* "Being made perfect"! Have we not just finished saying that He was perfect? As a man He was sinless, as Adam was before 'the Fall'. Like Adam He was tested all through His life and He kept the Law of God without fault. We read that He grew in stature and favour with God and man, demonstrating that it was within the ability of a 'perfect' man to keep God's Law without failure.

At thirty, he entered upon a different aspect of His life's career. He surrendered Himself to God to do His will. Had only a ransom been necessary God could have taken His life then. More was required. For three and a half years He suffered to fit Him as a priest, one who would have compassion on the ignorant and those out of the way. So as a priest He was perfected *"In all points he was tempted like as we (His brethren) are, yet without sin"*. Matt. 8.17 declares that He took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses, a quotation from Isaiah 53. When He healed the woman with the issue of blood He perceived that 'virtue' had gone out of Him and healed her. He was so tired on one occasion that the disciples took Him, as He was, in the boat to the other side of the lake. A night in communion and prayer with His Father was all that was necessary to restore Him. It only needed a word of command to cast out an evil spirit or many spirits. When he healed leprosy, or blindness or

deafness He did not become leprous or blind or deaf. In these things He was demonstrating the power and glory of the coming Kingdom.

"The author of salvation" is translated in the RSV and REB as the 'source of eternal salvation'. It is the duty of a priest to mediate between two or more parties who are at enmity with each other and this is what Christ was qualified to do. He became the 'source' of life through laying down His life daily on behalf of others and finally by giving up life itself to redeem them from death. As one who purchased mankind by the shedding of His own blood it is therefore through Him that salvation comes to all. There is an important qualification. He is the author of eternal salvation, not of necessity to all, but to all them that obey Him. God coerces no one. The gift of salvation is freely offered to all, but with a condition. *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but*

THE EXODUS

Part 3. Moses in Egypt

*A series intended to help
younger readers study the Bible.*

THE OPPRESSION

"In the course of time Joseph and his brothers and that entire generation died" (Ex.1.6 REB). That simple statement marks the end of an era. None who had known life in Canaan were left in Egypt. Joseph and Levi died about 75 years after the main family arrived. Joseph's other brothers probably died about the same time. Benjamin, ten years younger than Joseph may have been the last to go. All this coincided with war and unrest in Egypt. The Hyksos Pharaohs were being attacked by the native Egyptian warrior Aahmes and were eventually expelled from the land. Aahmes became the first Pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. The Israelites would have seen the events because the fiercest fighting was around Tanis immediately adjacent to Goshen. During the quieter period that followed *"The Israelites were prolific and increased greatly, becoming so numerous and strong that the land was full of them"* (Ex. 1.7). The word 'strong' here refers to physical strength and not to political power. The vigour of the patriarchs is now evident among their descendants. The land of Goshen, which may be the 'land' referred to in v.7 was close to the Nile delta and luxuriant. It produced

many kinds of food abundantly, and must have been an added blessing to their health and strength. There being no mention of the political upheaval it seems that the Israelites kept out of those matters while Aahmes consolidated his newly won empire.

It is unlikely that the 'new king' of verse 8 is Aahmes. He must have known about Joseph and his part in saving Egypt from the catastrophic famine. He may even have been a young child at the time of the famine. It is more likely that the Pharaoh who 'knew not Joseph' and who began the oppression of Israel was Thothmes I, the father of Pharaoh's daughter who rescued Moses. This would allow a century to pass while Israel enjoyed prosperity and increased in numbers, while at the same time allowing the memory of the patriarchal faith to fade. The Israelites adopted many Egyptian customs and something of their religion. Yet there would remain a few (a remnant) who, like Moses' parents, remembered the promises of God and believed that the nation would return to Canaan. The majority appear to have been well content with their lot under Egyptian government.

The words of Pharaoh *"These Israelites have become too many and too strong for us"* may have

referred as much to the physical superiority of the Israelites compared to the lightly built Egyptians. He foresaw a menace and proposed to counter it at once. Pharaoh may have recognised a principle re-discovered over the last century that populations have a habit of spiralling upwards. Pharaoh was looking to the future.

The first move was to put the people to forced labour in the public works, buildings, canal digging and similar projects. In the ancient world 'forced labour' was common, especially in a well organised country like Egypt. This may have begun in rota form so that the Israelites could continue to take care of the land and their animals. The situation deteriorated to virtual slavery in which the Israelites were torn from their homes and farms and herded into 'gangs' under the dreaded taskmasters. The word 'taskmaster' is frequently found on Egyptian monuments of the time especially in the time of Thothmes III the Pharaoh from whom Moses fled into Midian. The 'treasure cities' of the AV is now more usually translated 'store cities' and were places to accumulate surplus food or munitions of war. It was to such a place, Tanis, that the whole family of Jacob came (Genesis 47.11) when they first settled in Egypt. Claims that the Exodus was two centuries later because Rameses II first built them is unfounded. The people of Israel had the task as slaves of enlarging and extending these cities. Pithom like Tanis has been identified, and these were defence outposts in Goshen against possible invasion from the east.

The record of the midwives in Ex. 1.15-22 is unusual. Pharaoh, dissatisfied with the effect of his edicts against the Israelites, commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill male Israelite babies at birth. The record of only two midwives gives cause for debate. Certainly one would have expected rather more midwives to have been needed in a rapidly expanding population. A number of possible suggestions have been made which might solve the problem. One such suggestion is that Shiphras and Puah may have been leaders of the profession of midwives and therefore were expected to pass on the royal orders to the main body of the learned society. Another suggestion is that these two women attended the families of the tribal chiefs and therefore were concerned with the potential leaders of Israel. This

would be more effective than killing every male Israelite so that the main supply of slaves would be cut off. A third suggestion accords with the midwives' own account to Pharaoh. It is possible that the vast majority of Israel women were healthy and hardy and needed very little attention in giving birth to children, requiring only a minimum of help from nearest relatives.

Two expressions deserve comment. In v.10 the midwives refer to the 'stools'. Literally this is translated 'stone' and is sometimes thought to be the place where women giving birth to children sat. Alternatively it is suggested that the Hebrew word has been slightly altered and is the word for 'children'. That makes for a more understandable interpretation. The other word needing a slightly different translation from the AV is 'houses' in v.21. Modern translations use the word 'families' and thus God rewarded the midwives for their faithfulness, so that their name did not disappear from Israel's records.

Into this world of oppression, which lasted about a century, Moses was born, grew to manhood and fled to Midian. Exodus chapter 2 begins with a statement of the family into which Moses came. Young's translation places the definite article before 'daughter' and so makes Jochebed the direct daughter of Levi. If this is so, Amram married his aunt and both were born in Egypt. We know of two other children born to this pair, Miriam, a teenager (Heb. *almah*) of marriageable age and Aaron. Amram and Jochebed were pious folk and determined to save Moses from death in the Nile. Heb. 11.23 (REB) says that "*they saw what a fine child he was; they were not intimidated by the king's edict*". They may have acted similarly at the birth of Aaron a few years earlier. Amram was now leader of the tribe of Levi, a prince in Israel, Kohath, his father, being dead.

In placing her child in the Nile, Jochebed must have been guided by God. Such an action might have resulted in the baby being drowned. Miriam, however, kept watch perhaps because the parents were expecting something to happen. The princess of Egypt, daughter of Pharaoh came to the river to bathe. She was the famous Hat-shep-sut, daughter of Thothmes I, and after his death she ruled for thirty years. She was still young and married to her half brother who became Thothmes II who

physically was a weakling. This last fact may outwardly answer the question, why did she choose to adopt and rear as her own son a foundling Hebrew child who was 'under sentence of death'? At that time she had no child of her own, although later there was a daughter who died young. Eventually her husband had a child by a harem girl, who became Thothmes III.

Pharaoh's daughter may well have despaired having a son by her husband to present to him his heir. It is just possible that she conceived a plan whereby this healthy child, found in the river, could eventually be passed off as the heir apparent to the throne. It is hard to see any other motive and if the suggestion is correct, it made the decision that Moses had to take later, all the more crucial. He might have become Pharaoh of all Egypt with the power and the glory which that implied. This would also make the words of the writer to the Hebrews all the more meaningful, "*By faith Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, preferring to share hardship with God's people rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin. He considered the stigma that rests on God's Anointed greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.*" (Heb. 11.24-26).

The princess worked quickly and sent Miriam, who was hovering near, to fetch her mother and Jochebed found herself commissioned as nurse to the child who was in reality her own but known to the world as son of this royal 'mother'. This situation would have lasted only a few years and then it was time for the boy's education to begin in earnest. He would be handed over to court officials and Jochebed would have seen little or nothing more of him during those formative years. She could only trust that God had everything under His control.

Hat-shep-sut called her son Moses because she had drawn him out of the water. It appears that the princess used a clever play on words. In Hebrew 'Moses' is '*moshah*' which is close to '*mashah*' meaning to draw out. In Egyptian his name is close to '*mesu*' which means 'son' and is derived from the root meaning to produce or to draw, forth. '*Ra-mesu*' (Rameses) for example means 'son of

the sun', a name borne by many later Pharaohs. It would appear that the child received an Egyptian name which sounded normal enough but recalled the circumstances of his birth to those in the secret.

About five years after the child's birth, Pharaoh Thothmes I, Hat-shep-sut's father, died. During those years the princess had been regent, ruling jointly with her father. The weakly Thothmes II became nominal Pharaoh but his more able wife remained the real ruler of Egypt. She was able to take all the attributes and powers of a Pharaoh. Under her wise and effective administration Egypt enjoyed relative freedom from war and considerable progress in peaceful pursuits. The Queen promoted exploration to remote parts, possibly in eastern Africa and western India. The expedition returned with products unknown before in Egypt and so enriched the life of its people. Josephus asserts that Moses led a victorious army into Ethiopia and this could even have been a memory of the expedition.

Fourteen years later Hat-shep-sut was left a widow. Instead of putting the 20-year old Moses forward as Pharaoh, she married her stepson Thothmes III, proclaimed him Pharaoh and continued her authoritative rule. This may have been the time when Moses "*refused to be called a son of pharaoh's daughter*". Perhaps by now he had discovered the truth of his birth and felt the stirring of God within his heart to become the deliverer of His people. This would re-shape the whole course of his life though he may not yet have left the royal court.

Twenty years later Hat-shep-sut also died leaving Moses without his royal protector. It is remarkable that if Exodus was truly 1440 BC as is now most reliably thought to be, then the Queen's death was the fortieth year of Moses' life, (Acts 7.23). It was then that Pharaoh's daughter disappeared from the Exodus record. Pharaoh (Thothmes III), freed from domination of his step-mother, bearing no love for Moses, sought to slay him. So ended forty years of Moses' life at the Egyptian court. Before him was to be a totally new environment with its new experiences.

(To be continued)

"It is so in the revelation of Jesus Christ. When the eyes of men are opened to see Him in all His grace and wisdom and sympathy – in all the sufficiency of His sacrifice and the comfort of His

spirit – the heart is satisfied, and every rival light is lost in the infinite splendour."

Joseph Parker

THE SAVING POWER OF GOD

*A study of the
work of Christ*

2. The Removal of Sin

In the Old Testament, if a person broke God's law they were committing a sin. To break the law was also rebelling against their covenant with God. In some ways the people of Israel thought of sin as if it was a spiritual disease and that it could be cured straightaway in some circumstances. If the wrongdoing was a mistake and someone had unknowingly broken a law or failed to keep a ceremonial rule, the person concerned could make a sacrifice that restored their friendship with God. Such sins were like a weapon falling short of its target or 'missing the mark'. This kind of disobedience could be put right by a religious ritual that would make amends and cleanse the sin.

Living in the covenant with their holy God meant that the people of Israel had a 'holy' way of life. Anyone or anything that was not 'holy' was 'unclean'. This was not necessarily a moral wrongdoing, for some animals were clean and some were not. A religious ceremony could make people and some things 'holy' or 'clean' and this might mean offering a sacrifice. Deliberate wrongdoing was rebellion against God and for this there was no reprieve. Such an attitude could 'infect' the whole company of His people and an example of this was the 'sin of Achan' at Jericho recorded in Joshua 7. In Israel, life was bound up with their covenant with God and the inevitable result of a permanent defect in that relationship was death.

When a person was 'put right with God', an atonement was made. The Anglo-Saxon word 'atonement' literally means 'to make at one' or to restore unity between parties which has been broken. The Hebrew word 'kaphar' originally contained the idea of covering and it was used in Jewish ritual as if a fault was covered over out of sight or blotted out. It is used in this sense in Genesis 32:20 when Jacob sent a gift to 'appease' his brother Esau's anger. Jacob hoped that the huge gifts would cover over the apparent wrong he had done to Esau many years before. As Kidner points out this was the pagan's approach to his deity but in the Old Testament a man's gift to God is first God's gift to him. Jacob would soon discover that grace not negotiation is 'the only solvent of guilt'.

In explaining the word 'atonement' we are met with two equally difficult words. One is 'expiation' or expunging the sin so it is the wrong action that is addressed. The other word is 'propitiation' or appeasement in which the approach is to God. Yet the Old Testament and far less the New Testament, do not give the impression that God is a far-off deity whose wrath needs to be 'appeased' or made calm. This is quite different from Jesus interceding on our behalf. The fact is, that definitions in words cannot describe the wonderful way in which God makes the approach to sinners and initiates reconciliation. Something of this fact comes through in the Levitical sacrifices and formulae but it is only when we look for Old Testament principles about God's work of salvation that we are ready to understand what the New Testament has to say about it.

Some of those principles concern sin itself. Sin is very serious because it leads to the destruction of life and this was made clear from the beginning of Genesis. Sin is universal and none escapes its slavery. Sinners cannot put themselves right no matter how they try and this has been observable since the beginning of human history and is even more so today. Worst of all, sin separates from God because He is holy and those who would have fellowship with Him must be holy too.

Some scholars believe that 'propitiation' has a connection with the idea of a "sweet odour to the Lord" as with Noah sacrificing after the flood (Gen. 8:21). On the other hand 'expiation' can mean the removal of sin as a barrier between God and His people. In earlier times this was likened to God refusing to live among the people of Israel because of their sin. Later it was described as the Lord hiding His face from His people (Exodus 33:3; Isaiah 59:2).

Not all sacrifices were for 'sin'. Interesting examples are the 'drink offerings' or libations that were mostly of wine. David as a fugitive from Saul desperately wanted to taste the water from the well at Bethlehem. Some of his most trusted and bravest warriors obtained the water from Adullam and brought it to their lord. David refused to drink it because it represented the blood of those 'mighty

men' who had jeopardised their lives to bring it to him. So he poured out the water as an offering and gift to God.

The covenant had been made with the whole nation and provision for the removal of sin was necessary for the whole congregation. Unintentional faults on the part of individuals were accounted for by sacrifice on the 'Day of Atonement' made by priests on behalf of all the people once a year in the autumn. The High Priest and his assistants represented the whole nation and it was especially important that any estrangement between them and Yahweh should be reconciled. A large sacrifice of a heifer was made on their behalf before they could act for everyone else in Israel. It was then the responsibility of the High Priest to take the blood of one of two goats into the Most Holy place of the Tabernacle or Temple where it was sprinkled on and before the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant. The other goat, chosen by lot, was ceremonially released into the wilderness in order that the sins of the people might be carried away from the camp. This was the escape or scapegoat, an Old Testament expression from which the modern metaphor is derived. By this mechanism the holiness of the whole congregation of Israel was preserved. It is worth noticing that the holiest place in the nation of Israel was the 'mercy seat'. This was the place where sin was removed and it was called the place of **mercy** and indicates how different was the great and wonderful God of the universe from the human creation of idol worship.

It was a primary requirement of the person offering the sacrifice that his heart should be humble and repentant before God. There was no place before Yahweh for 'buying God off' with ritual sacrifices and offerings (Hosea 6.6). The prophets roundly condemned those who tried to do so and then 'go out from God's presence' to commit acts of oppression and injustice. It was the spirit of what was done in Israel under the Law Covenant which Jesus emphasised and he quoted the text from Hosea.

Restoring the covenant relationship by means of the shedding of blood must be connected to the fact that the covenant was initially sealed by a blood sacrifice. This gives purpose to the use of animal sacrifice in reconciling the parties in the broken relationship. In the New Testament the

writer to the Hebrews (9.22) states clearly that "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*". It is not clear whether this is intended to be a universal law or just a reference to the Covenant that Moses made but his whole argument is based upon the parallel between Jesus' sacrifice and that made on the Jewish Day of Atonement. Although the Letter to Hebrews conveys the more distinct lessons from Jewish ceremonial law, the basic ideas of Israel's piety are constantly recurring in Paul's letters.

In Ephesians 5.2 (RSV) Paul used the analogy concerning Christ as "*a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*." In 2 Cor. 2.15 there is a similar expression when he wrote "*we are an aroma of Christ*" which must mean that those who follow Christ take His work to a waiting world. Later in Eph. 5 (vv 25, 26) we read that Christ "*loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her*." Perhaps the most significant of the many references of Paul to Jesus' work in removing our sin is Eph. 1.7 (RSV) where Paul gathers up several Old Testament ideas into one remarkable text "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us*." The same theme runs through the letter of the Colossians where he writes of God reconciling all things through Christ and "*making peace by the blood of his cross*".

Israel's covenant relationship with God was the major principle of the Old Testament theology. It was the means of separating Israel from the remainder of mankind. They were outside the commonwealth of Israel or Kingdom of God. Christ's work of salvation had removed the barriers between God and man and therefore between Israelites and Gentiles because they were now all under one covenant. This is the continued theme of Paul as he freely uses it to describe the new community of Christians. So in Eph. 2.13 he says "*now in Christ Jesus you who once were afar off have been brought near by the blood of Christ*". Whatever 'feelings' modern man may have about the use of blood, to Paul there was a sacred connection. This was that which joined Creator and creation and it is the gift of God through **grace**.

Paul made much effort to contrast the **works** of the law with the free grace by faith through the Gospel as for example in Galatians 2.21 and 5.4.

The Sinai covenant had been one of grace at its beginning. Israel had not earned her place in the favour of Yahweh nor had she become His people by her own virtue. The Lord had chosen Israel and made her a nation of kings and priests for His work to all nations (Exodus 19.5, 6). Unlike her neighbours, Israel did not inherit her God by ancestry and it was in the goodness of God that He demonstrated His providential concern for her welfare. It is this principle which underlies Paul's argument about justification and which he illustrates by reference to their patriarch Abraham (Romans 5). It is also implicit in the remarks of Stephen concerning the call of Abraham in Acts 7.

In the study of the atonement and the removal of sin there are two scriptures in Paul's writings which are not only interesting but very difficult to fully interpret. They are quoted here from REB which seems to catch the spirit of what Paul is writing about although it is inevitable that some will be unhappy about this translation. Amid his wonderful discussion of the whole subject in Romans the apostle writes in 3.25, "*For God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his death, effective through faith.*" We are again confronted with the difficulty of translation into either 'propitiation' or 'expiation'. We all know that the result is the removal of sin from the sinner. What we are less sure of is the manner in which it is done. Using Barrett and Vine who explain the matter at length we are left with two ways of interpreting the expression that in the AV is 'propitiation'. This is 'God's manner of dealing with sin' or 'this is God's Mercy Seat'. Jesus Christ is the place where God's mercy removes sin.

The other text has given, perhaps, even more opportunity for pet theories to be expanded for it contains those words in the AV text "*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*" The REB translation is "*Christ was innocent of sin, yet for our sake God made him one with human sinfulness so that in him we might be made one with the righteousness of God.*" Those same words apply for this is God's means of dealing with sin, God's Mercy Seat. The Son of God became identified with us so that we might be

identified with Him.

When followers of the Lord Jesus Christ accept Him as their Saviour and all their sins are forgiven and taken away, there remains the problem that they still sin. That which they inherited because they are children of Adam has been removed for ever because of what Jesus did on Calvary. Even although disciples have been 'born again' and become a new creation, they still do that which is wrong. Paul and John address this problem in different ways. John is concerned with the guilty feelings that come to the believer, who in spite of being forgiven of sin through the power of Jesus' sacrifice still acts, speaks and thinks in a wrong way. His solution to the problem is found in 1 John 1. 8,9 (REB) "*If we claim to be sinless, we are self deceived and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins he is just and may be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrongdoing.*" A little further on in 2.2 John writes "*He is himself a sacrifice to atone for our sins, and not ours only but the sins of the whole world.*" Paul approaches the problem from his own personal experience. In Romans 7.7-25 he describes the battle between good and evil in his own life. No matter how we excuse or explain that battle, Paul has written it in the present tense and it is clearly a vivid experience. The accuser in these experiences is Satan not God. Our Father is the initiator of peace and reconciliation. He is the one who provides the means of removal of sin. Paul's solution to the problem is the same as John's and it is to be found in the deliverance from sin which is "*through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (v.25) This is not the 'preserve' of scholar or theologian but the privilege of every believer in Christ Jesus.

We need to accept the fact that we sin – and will continue to do so through our earthly life and that in spite of the fact that our sin has been removed by 'the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world'. Confession of our faults and acceptance of God's mercy and forgiveness through Jesus is the only way that the guilt of sin can be removed. God removes our sin and it goes into the depths of the ocean. We are to observe the notice, 'No Fishing'.

(To be continued)

"What is freedom? Not mere political independence, but the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, the reign of Truth and Non-violence in every walk of life."

(Mahatma Gandhi speaking at Panchgani, India, 19th July 1945. Gandhi was a Hindu by religion, and therefore his reference to the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth as the requisite for true freedom is doubly interesting.)

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

Amos 7.1-17

8. Desolation of Israel

With the close of the sixth chapter, Amos had very nearly completed his mission to the northern Kingdom of Israel, the Ten Tribes. The first section of his prophecy, recorded in the first two chapters, foretold the Lord's judgments soon to come upon the six surrounding nations because of their treatment of Israel. From that the prophet passed, in chapters 3 to 6, to a denunciation of Israel's own idolatrous and godless position and the Divine judgment that must inevitably come upon them in consequence. His four discourses, were addressed respectively to the political and military powers in the nation, the commercial and social world, the apostate priesthood and the kings and nobility. All four sections of the nation felt the lash of his tongue, and to all four he foretold imminent destruction at the hand of the Assyrians unless they repented and returned to God in sincere and wholehearted allegiance. They did not repent; the national life went on as before with little heed given to this Judean prophet who had come into their midst, and whose figure, standing in the court of their idolatrous temple at Bethel, had become so familiar as to attract little notice. Almost certainly a few, more thoughtful than their fellows, would have heeded his message and made some attempt to mend their ways, but in the main Amos' burning words had fallen upon deaf ears. So it came about that he found himself being led by the Spirit to stand once more in the temple court and deliver his last and parting message to the people of the Ten Tribes.

Chapter 7 opens a new section in the Book of Amos. The prophet is now no longer merely a preacher of right and wrong, reproving the people and their rulers for their shortcomings and telling them, against the background of the contemporary political situation, the Assyrian menace, what must be the inevitable result of their sinful course. That aspect of his mission is now finished and done with. The people have not repented. The judgment must now come. In chapter 7 Amos becomes a prophet in a different sense, one who by inspiration of the Holy Spirit foretells events which are yet future but will shortly and surely come to pass. True to the Spirit of Biblical prophecy, he forecasts in the form of symbolic pictures, vivid metaphors

which meant little to those who heard them at the time. They are so apt that they come back to the memory when the events actually happened, and convince those passing through these events that there had indeed been a true prophet among them and the words he had spoken were truly from God.

A new mode of address marks the change. The previous discourses of reproof and exhortation were each prefaced by "*Hear this word...*" Now in this chapter these final declarations open with "*Thus hath the Lord shewed unto me.*" The time for preaching repentance is past; now he is declaring what the Lord will certainly do. Amos is now describing what in a very few years more became history.

The first nine verses of the chapter tell of three distinct visions which had been vouchsafed to the prophet. First of all he beheld a plague of locusts ravaging the land at the time of the summer harvest when the people would normally need all they could gather for their winter subsistence. Stricken with sorrow at the sight and knowing that if the plague be not lifted the people were doomed to starvation. Amos cried out "*O Lord God, have mercy, I beseech thee. How can Jacob recover, he has so little?*" The Lord relented and removed the scourge. "*This shall not be, said the Lord*" (Chapter 7.1-3).

Next came a more disturbing vision. "*Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me*" says the prophet "*Behold, the Lord called for judgment by fire, and it devoured depths, and devoured a portion of the land.*" Again the prophet made his plea: "*O Lord God, cease I beseech thee. How can Jacob recover, he has so little?*" Again the Lord relented. "*This shall not be, saith the Lord God*" and the devouring fire was checked in its onward course (verses 4-6).

Lastly came a scene having a terrible finality. The Lord was standing alongside a wall that had been well and truly built by means of a plumb line and the Lord had a plumb line in His hand. The implication is that upon testing the wall it had been found to have become defective and must be demolished. "*Amos, what seest thou?*" asked the Lord. Dejectedly the prophet replied "*A plumb line.*" He knew what it meant. He knew that Israel

no longer measured up to the integrity and righteousness of the Covenant and he knew what the penalty had to be. This time he did not plead for mercy for Israel. He waited in silence instead to hear the words of the doom he knew must come.

"Behold" said the Lord "I will set my plumb line in the midst of my people Israel. I will not pass over their transgressions any more. The hilltop sanctuaries of the nation shall be desolated, and the temples shall be laid waste. And I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword" (Chapter 7.7-9). This was to be the end. Twice had there been a partial judgment and each time the Lord had lifted it before the nation had been destroyed. The third time was final and the kingdom of the Ten Tribes was to come to its end.

All this came to pass within thirty years. Only after the event had materialised could the symbol be interpreted. The downfall of the Ten-tribe kingdom was brought about by these three separate invasions of the Assyrians over that period, and those three invasions are pictured by these three prophetic visions. Here is a case which, when applied to the facts of history, proves that the Lord does *"reveal his secrets to his servants the prophets"* (Amos 3.7; Daniel 2.9; Isaiah 22.14). The coming event, not yet taken place, was known to the mind of God, and by means of metaphor He imparted that knowledge to Amos that He might set the seal upon His warnings to Israel.

Chapter 3 verses 11-15 relate to this same sequence of events and what is to be said now will be to some extent a repetition of what was said then. There is a difference. Chapter 3 was a warning of what would happen if Israel did not repent. Israel did not repent; chapter 7 is now a statement in symbol of what assuredly is going to happen. Chapter 3 could be averted, just as Jonah's warning to Ninevites only a few decades earlier was averted (Jonah 3.10). Chapter 7 could by no means be averted. The fiat had gone forth.

Ten years later, when Menahem was king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser invaded the land with his Assyrian troops, demanding tribute in token of submission and allegiance. These were the locusts of the first vision of chapter 7. They commenced ravaging Israel like locusts consuming the crops, but before the situation became completely hopeless Menahem gathered together a thousand talents of silver by forced levies from all the

wealthy men of his kingdom and with this bought off the conqueror. So the Assyrian departed and Israel was reprieved for a short space. Verse 2 indicates that Divine intervention came *"when they (the locusts) had made an end of the grass of the land"* which might easily be interpreted that when the Assyrians had extracted the maximum of wealth possible from the hapless Israelites they raised the invasion and went home.

This was only a respite. Five years later the Assyrian king was back again, and this time he meant more serious business. In the second vision Amos saw a devouring fire which struck at the subterranean streams of water and the cultivated land and consumed, not the whole, but a part. Again the judgment was lifted before the land was entirely consumed. The reality, Tiglath-Pileser annexed to Assyria the entire northern half of Israel's territory, including the tribal territories of Asher, Naphtali, Zebulun, Manasseh and Issachar (it was this which was referred to in Isaiah 9.1). This left Pekah, who was now king of Israel, with only about half of the Ten-tribe kingdom. Many of the inhabitants of the conquered territory were taken into captivity in Assyria. Thus was fulfilled the vision of the devouring fire which threatened the entire land but in the end, as says verse 4, only *"did eat up a part"*, as in the AV and more lucidly *"devoured a portion of the land"*. Again the Lord intervened and removed the Assyrian before he had accomplished his full purpose.

Thirteen uneasy years passed. Israel was free from invasion, for Tiglath-Pileser was now occupied with rebellion in other parts of his empire and found himself dealing with a new emerging and formidable enemy, Merodach-Baladan of Babylon (who appears in the Bible in connection with Hezekiah, Isaiah 39). It might well have been that Hoshea, the last king of the Ten Tribes, deluded himself into thinking that the menace was lifted and that what was left of the nation would be able to preserve its freedom and continue in the old ways. If that was so, he reckoned without God. The third vision had yet to be fulfilled. That vision shewed the Lord standing by the wall of Israel with His plumb line and the decree had gone forth to demolish what was left. The word for 'wall' here used almost invariably refers to the defending wall of a city or town. It is tempting to think that there is subtle allusion here to the walls of the city of

Samaria, capital of Israel, which were demolished at this time after three years of siege. At the end of the thirteen years, the old warrior, Tiglath-Pileser had just died, his successor Shalmaneser V invaded Israel for what was to be the last time.

It is true to the prophecy, the high walls of Samaria were broken down and the city destroyed. The apostate worship of Israel with its decadent priesthood came to an end. Hoshea was imprisoned by the Assyrian monarch and all who were left in the land carried into captivity to end their lives in the mountain country of present day Kurdistan, the land of Israel being re-peopled by the immigrants brought by the Assyrians from other parts of the empire. These were the people later known as the Samaritans.

This was the Captivity of the Ten Tribes. They never came back. In later days their whereabouts became a matter of enquiry and speculation and developed into the saga of the 'Lost Ten Tribes' around which many and varied theories have been woven. The alleged wanderings of the 'Lost Ten Tribes' have been traced all over the world and their descendants identified with many sections of the human race. In actual fact they probably never left the wilds of Kurdistan. They are most likely to have integrated with the native population, already a mixture of Assyrian, Mede, Aramean and Urartian, although even so late as the Middle Ages the Israelite strain in all this area was very strong. The modern Kurd, especially as regards his fighting qualities, bears a very strong resemblance to the ancient Israelite. It is true that full-blooded Jews have spread into every part of the world but these are mainly descendants of those taken into captivity from the southern kingdom by the Babylonians in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, or who had voluntarily emigrated southwards during troubled times and more particularly when the Jewish state was re-established in the days of Cyrus of Persia. So far as the northern kingdom was concerned, to whom Amos preached, they dropped out of history at this point.

Yet there must be a remnant, for the avowed purpose of God is that in the fulness of time the twelve tribes will be re-united and re-established in the land. The full expression of this intention is to be found in Ezekiel 37.15-28; in this passage the ultimate welding of the separate kingdoms into one entity is clearly shown. It follows therefore

that the Lord knows where to find His ancient people and will one day bring them together.

Amaziah the High Priest of the nation had heard enough. He had obviously become increasingly restive under the scourge of the prophet's words. Now he intervened and Amos records his intervention in what amounts to a scrap of history inserted into the prophecy. "*Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For this Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land*" (chapter 7.10-11). The High Priest was guilty of some duplicity here, for what Amos had said was that God would rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword (ch. 7.9) which was quite a different thing. In point of fact, Jeroboam II died peacefully in his bed, quite an unusual end for a king of the northern kingdom. Amos' expression 'the house of Jeroboam' was probably an allusion to the northern kingdom's first king, Jeroboam I. In a poetic sense, although not literally true, the whole kingship of Israel to the end of the nation was described as the 'house' of its first king. That which Jeroboam had founded when the ten tribes seceded in the days of Rehoboam son of Solomon was now to be destroyed by the sword of Assyria.

It does not appear that Jeroboam took any notice of his High Priest's complaint. He seems to have been quite indifferent to any effect the prophet's mission may have had on his people. So Amaziah took the initiative himself. "*O thou seer*" he said to Amos, "*Go flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there earn thy living and prophesy. But prophesy not any more at Bethel, for it is the royal shrine and the national temple*" (chapter 7.12-13). It almost looks as if Amos was in the way of influencing an appreciable proportion of the people and the high priest, sensing competition, wanted him out of the way. He was not of Israel; he was of Judah and the best thing he could do was return to his own land and do his preaching there.

One can imagine Amos taking a cool, searching look at this man who was determined to retain his own influence and possessions in the community and would allow nothing to stand in his way. More than any other man Amaziah represented

and supported the apostate worship of Israel. He had no Divine authority to exercise the functions of priesthood. The true High Priest of the nation at this time was Azariah of the line of Aaron, the legitimate holder of the title, administering his sacred office in the Temple of the Lord at Jerusalem. This Amaziah was an upstart, an impostor, conducting false worship to a heathen god in a temple which stood in flagrant defiance of the basic principle that Jerusalem must be the seat of Israel's worship. So Amos, knowing all this and realising that the end of the idolatrous system of worship had come, felt the Spirit's inspiration upon him to utter one last prediction, a personal one concerning Amaziah himself, the judgment soon to come upon him for his unbelief and apostasy. He told Amaziah that his wife would become the property of the invading soldiery and subjected to the most degrading form of slavery, his sons and daughters slain by the sword, his land and possessions divided among others and he himself taken as a captive to the unclean land of

Assyria, and there he would die. "*And Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land*" (ch. 7.17).

No more is known of Amaziah. As one of the leading men in Israel he would certainly have been taken into Assyria and there subjected to the barbarous treatment the Assyrians invariably meted out to their defeated enemies. These words uttered, it would seem that Amos did as he was bidden and turned his steps southward, shaking the dust of the temple courts at Bethel off his feet and returning to Judah. The remainder of his prophecy is consistent with the conclusion that he delivered it, not at Bethel to a 'Ten Tribe' audience but in Judah to the people of the 'Two Tribes'. From this point his prophecy takes on more and more of the 'latter day' undertones. This leads him at the last to his celebrated prediction of the ultimate restoration of all Israel to Divine favour and their final cleansing and preparation for their Millennial mission as God's evangelist to all the nations.

(To be continued)

TOTAL ECLIPSE

Where were you when it happened? It grew strangely cold and the faded light had a subtle, unearthly tinge to it. In the west, in the area of totality, the birds ceased to sing and the darkness swept in, covering the earth like a dark tide upon the seashore. For two minutes there was an immense air of expectancy, until with a flash, the hidden rays of the sun broke open the covers of night and poured forth its light and warmth upon a welcoming earth.

What was it like in those three hours of darkness, when Christ hung on the cross? The moments that followed His cry "*it is finished*" were interrupted by the shaking of the ground. The Temple's great curtain separating the Holy Place was torn from top to bottom, thick as it was ... What could it mean?

Our Lord lay in the grave that night, and the next day, Would it be forever? With Him there, the light had gone out of the world. The whole of

time and eternity, the vast distances of space with all its spinning orbs, stood still in hushed expectancy. Each evil entity watched the stillness of the scene with malevolent intensity and the darkest of hope.

The angels beneath the glorious arches of heaven's realm held their breath, longing to know but not fully understanding the import of what might happen. All creation stopped. Time itself slowed to a halt and silence stretched into eternity.

A still small voice echoed through the vastness - "**This is my beloved Son**" - and a great crescendo of joy and adoration broke forth from untold millions of heavenly voices. Jesus was alive! Creation stirred itself and leapt for joy.

God had set His seal on all that His Son had achieved at Calvary, light flooded the world once again.... but more..... **The Light filled the hearts of men.**

Contributed by a reader.

Gone from us

Sister Gwen May (*Long Sutton/Yeovil*)

Sister Vi Charlton (*Chalfont St Peters*)

Brother Sedge Hardwick (*Yeovil*)

Brother Albert O Hudson (*Milborne Port*) An obituary in the next issue.

Sister Edith Abott (*Bury*)

Sister Amy Wood (*Rugby*)

Brother Hermann Bezner (*Israel*)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

REDEEMING THE TIME

We often treat our invaluable time as if it were of little account. Our friends demand it from us and we freely bestow it upon them as though we had an inexhaustible supply. Sometimes, in a restless mood, we find that time drags wearily and aimlessly along. On other occasions, though we may be equally inactive and without purpose, time seems to fly past unheeded. We cannot waste nor misuse it without serious loss and injury to ourselves. Our life is but a vapour, that appears for a while and then vanishes away (James 4. 14). How important, therefore, that we use time well, for the day will come when the true value of the present life will be seen in all its importance.

Our life belongs to God and should be entirely consecrated to His service. We are stewards, not only of our talents and our possessions but also of our time. We are called to choose things to occupy ourselves with the purpose of redeeming the time. So we avoid worthless pursuits that unsettle the mind and swallow up this valuable asset with which we are entrusted. This does not mean that every moment of the day must be crammed with ceaseless exertion and that life must become a round of urgent business and pressing engagements.

Christians can too easily become so absorbed in Church work that incessant activities crowd every available moment of their time, whether at work or travelling or at home. Unconsciously we may busy ourselves in human effort, in great and wonderful work and lose touch and sight of the living realities of the spiritual life. The human heart readily flies to tangible work to provide some form of satisfaction and thereby misses the greatest satisfaction of all in the love, joy and peace which passes all understanding. That which usurps time that should be consecrated to personal devotion and meditation becomes an enemy, whether it is religious work or merely worldly pleasure. What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? There is nothing we can afford to barter for this. The Master will commend only that servant who has done His bidding. His other efforts, however well intentioned are useless if he has not carried out the express command of his Lord. Many shall say in that day *"Have we not done many wonderful works in thy name?"* and He will answer, *"I never knew you"*. We may be tampering with other people's affairs and

neglecting our own. Upon the proper attention to our own business depends our ability to be useful to others, either in religion or any other sphere of life. We can persuade ourselves that we are accomplishing a good work for the Lord and for our fellow brethren when we are really hindering both them and ourselves. We can be burdened with anxiety to save others and yet not have yielded ourselves to the Lord's instructions regarding our own salvation.

This personal aspect of our lives is important. We have a tendency to get into a rut and stay there. So He removes us from our labours and we are compelled to remain outwardly idle so that our inward spiritual contacts with God may be renewed and developed. Moses had a learned mind, skilled in all the arts of the Egyptians. Forty long years in the desert must have seemed a lifetime wasted but it was a necessary preparation for a greater work in that very same wilderness in later years. We see similar periods in the lives of David, Elijah and others. Such a wilderness experience was part of Paul's discipline when he conferred not with *"flesh and blood"* but went into Arabia to prepare for the work to which God had called him, even as our Lord Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness before He began His ministry.

We may find this training monotonous and perhaps feel how unavailing it all is. It does not gain the applause of others, often not even their recognition. It is a more arduous task and brings us less into the limelight than the man-made problems of Church government. It is much less conspicuous than engaging in some struggle for the justification and supremacy of a particular movement, party or sect. It is actually the most important feature of all our efforts and it is in this process that we discover the lasting peace and joy which we seek. Let the Lord choose the way, and then let us maintain it at all costs leaving the results with Him. It may lead to disappointment, our efforts may appear fruitless and defeat may continually dog our steps but we must remember such are His methods to train us.

Devotion, submission and patience are the only offerings we can make to God when active and urgent duties are cut off. Yet these are the acceptable gifts without which all other service is

valueless. The meek spirit which patiently bears disappointment, irritation, reproach and contradiction, is using time in its most profitable sense and making growth in grace much more rapid than the many who are more actively employed. Neither is the time lost which we are trying to use profitably when we have accepted and borne with forbearance and gentleness the unwelcome and inevitable intrusion that has interrupted all our well-prepared plans. However

important our occupation, however praiseworthy our objective, greater and more praiseworthy is the control we have gained over our own spirit and much more profitably have we redeemed the time. For the great end and objective of every moment of our fleeting days, though it be but here a little and there a little, precept upon precept, line upon line, is to transform us by the renewing of our minds into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

From the 'Forest Gate Bible Monthly'

Life and the Living Word

"I know whom I have believed.
Jesus my Lord! I know his name
His name is all my trust
Nor will he put my soul to shame
Or let my soul be lost."

The Scriptures are more than history or a set of rules and advice for good living. Christian faith is based upon a person. Jesus is the foundation of belief, the pattern and giver of Life. When He was rebuked by the Jews for having healed a sick man on the Sabbath, they were abiding by the rules. Nothing was to be done on that day, according to the strict letter of the law.

The emphasis is on life and the giver of life. Belief in a set of doctrines soon becomes lip service, ritual and formality. The written, spoken word, constantly repeated, becomes a mere party cry, the badge of sectarianism. The living Word gives life. It was Paul who recognised this when he declared his creed. Not what, but "***whom I have believed***". He served Jesus. His hope for the future was in His hands. He followed Jesus and imitated

Him in his own life of service. The weakness of formal religion is that it serves creeds, sects, systems, visible leaders. It prefers the seen to the unseen; to action, number and 'success'. Man is not saved by 'works' but by faith. Life is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ. It cannot be earned... Creeds are vain if Jesus is not the living Lord, Saviour triumphant over death...

All Scripture leads to Jesus. He stands at the pinnacle of history and to Him all men must look for life, for there is no other source. "*There is no other name given under heaven among men, by which we must be saved.*" Without Him nothing is and without Him we are nothing and can do nothing. He is the life giving water and the bread of Heaven which satisfies our hunger and thirst and sustains us through every experience. He is the shepherd who cares for us when we falter, the door of the fold that protects us from wolves which devour the sheep. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Before Him every knee must bow.

Purpose in Life

A flower that stops short of its flowering misses its purpose. We were created for more than our spiritual development; reproduction not just development is the goal of mature living, reproduction in other lives. There is a tendency in some Christians, which runs parallel to the high cultivation that spends its whole energy on the production of beautiful blooms at the expense of the seed. The famed Japanese cherry blossoms at Washington illustrate this. They bring forth a profusion of flowers but produce no fruit. The flowers that are bent on perfecting themselves by

becoming 'double' end in barrenness. That is like the barrenness of the soul that comes to those whose interests are all concentrated upon its own spiritual well-being, heedless of the seeds of those around them. The ideal flower is the one that uses its gifts as means to an end; the brightness and sweetness are not for its own glory, they are but to attract the bees and butterflies that will fertilize it to make it fruitful. "*It is more blessed to give than receive.*"

VALUES

Not human values
But His revelation,
Not anxious striving
but calm contemplation,
Not asking only
But gladly receiving,
Ceasing from effort
and simply believing.

Not random prayer
but sustained interceding,
Not our own way
but content with his leading,
Not heady impulse
but sober reflection,
Seeing and seeking
His changeless perfection.

Not rigid dogma
but living salvation,
Not slavish duty
but love's ministration,
Never enforced
but responsive and willing -
Fullness of love
is the law's true fulfilling.

Not hasty judgment
but warm understanding,
Not justice merely
but mercy unending,
Not measured kindness
but love overflowing,
Giving and comforting,
new life bestowing.

Not proud ambition
but sacrifice tender,
Not mere compliance
but joyful surrender,
Not self-assertion
but costly subjection,
Sharing his sufferings,
His resurrection.

Not brash beginning
but brave consummation,
Not fading promise
but full realisation,
Not first intention
but finished endeavour -
These are His values,
and they stand forever.

'Values' is taken from 'The Quest' - a collection of poems by Margot King-Smith, published after her death in 1985. Copies of the book are available from Beresford King-Smith, 8 South Parade, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands. B72 1QY. The cost (including postage) is £2. Please make cheques payable to CART (Christian African Relief Trust).

Job, in the midst of all his afflictions, was careful not to sin with his lips. He knew that his words would be taken by the Lord as an index of his heart, and he was careful to keep both the heart and the words right, saying "What! Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil (calamities, troubles - for discipline or refining)? ... The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." There was no spirit of rebellion in a heart out of whose abundance came such words of loving submission, patience and faith under severe testings, and that, too, without a clear apprehension of the Divine wisdom in permitting them.

How necessary to the stability of Christian character is such a resolution, and the self control which develops under a firm adherence to it. In an

unfriendly world we can expect to receive only the reproaches of our Master, for the servant is not above his Lord. The world, the flesh and the Devil oppose our way: there are fightings within and fears without, and many are the arrows and fiery darts aimed at the righteous. But what is the safe attitude of the soul under afflictions and severe testings? Is it not in silence before God, waiting and watching first to see his leading, his will, in every matter before presuming to touch things that often involve so much? So the Psalmist suggests, saying "I was dumb with silence: I held my peace, even from good (even doing or saying what seemed good in my own right); and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, and in my self-communing there burnt a fire (description of a fiery trial).

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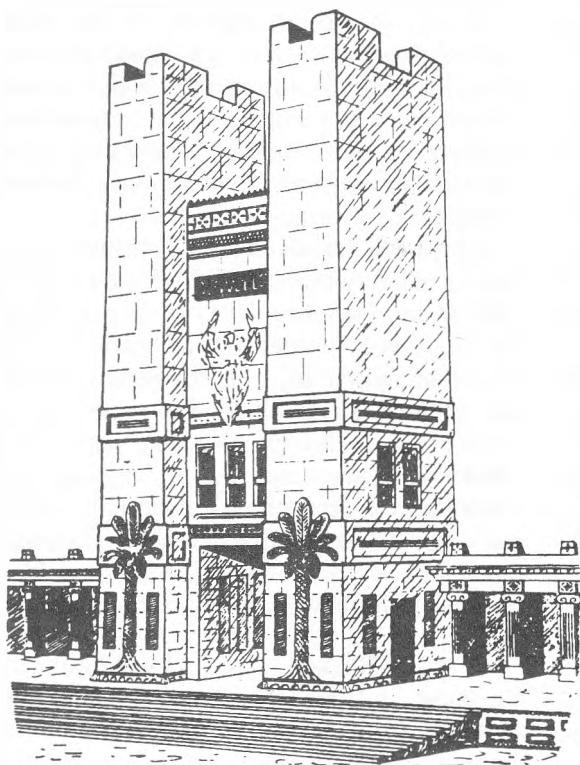
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Obituary

Albert Owen Hudson (1899-2000) was the Editor of the Bible Study Monthly from 1935 till 1995. During that time he was led by the Lord to develop it from little more than a monthly newsletter into a fully-grown magazine. He saw it through the difficulties of wartime production, while he was evacuated from his home in Kent to Leicester. In 1944-45 paper restrictions reduced its size but Albert had the joy of seeing its size and circulation grow after the war. In 1955 the BSM and associated literature was sent out "without money and without price". From then on, the work of the Bible Fellowship Union was supported entirely by gifts. It was an act of faith, the like of which characterised his whole life. The BSM continued to reach out across the world.

Albert was a Christian gentleman and child of God, to whom the Father had given many gifts. As a brother in Christ he was very generous and kind. He was always interested in young people, helping and encouraging them in many ways. In later years he pioneered the Retirement Home, Gainsborough House where he and Marjorie spent his last year.

He had a monumental memory but also a very methodical filing system to store the fruit of his tremendously wide reading. His knowledge of history and the ancient world was outstanding.

He always sought to develop his gifts so that whatever he did, he worked for the Lord to the highest possible standards. This was so in quiet practical tasks as well as in more public Christian work. He was a highly qualified electrical engineer and made several valuable inventions still in

operation. From the early 1920s he was a devoted husband to Doris who died in 1977. Later he married Marjorie who has lovingly cared for him in these latter fruitful years.

He loved the study of the Scriptures and sought to clarify doctrinal aspects of the faith. He discussed all things in the spirit of tolerance, always learning from others. He had a wonderful gift with words, particularly the written word. His addresses contained much valuable wisdom. His Christian writing and other activities demonstrated a rare imagination.

Above all he loved and faithfully served his Master in every aspect of life. For 83 years he was totally consecrated to the Lord and His Kingdom. He so loved to speak and write about that Kingdom and the joy of knowing that it will some day embrace all mankind. Few can have written about it as he did for so many years, in such a scholarly manner and yet in language that can reach to people through the twentieth century. He was a pastor and an evangelist. He has left a remarkable spiritual legacy. May God bless and reward Marjorie who cared for Albert so faithfully.

Marjorie Hudson writes ... I would like to thank all those in the UK, America, Australia and everyone world wide who have sent me messages of sympathy on the death of my dear Albert, and to say how much they have helped me through this sad and difficult time. I could feel God answering the prayers of you all. We shall miss him terribly but we shall all meet in the not too distant future.

In all temptation and difficulty the way of deliverance is to remember that the eye of the Lord Jesus as a Friend is upon you; that his presence as a Friend is with you; and then to ask with confidence and to expect with certainty.

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind by the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.

(Dr Temple)

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

"I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20.27)

This was a memorable occasion when the Apostle Paul conferred for the last time with the elders of the Church at Ephesus. It was a church that owed so much to his ministry and perhaps largely on account of that ministry stood pre-eminent among the Christian communities of Roman Asia. The Apostle knew that he was seeing them for the last time. The inward inspiration of the Holy Spirit told him that he would come to the end of the way without visiting Ephesus again. He was not perturbed; his only desire was that he might finish his course with joy (v.24) and be remembered for the work he had done among them. So he called them to witness that he had faithfully discharged his mission of declaring unto them what he called "*all the counsel of God*". He could not but have been aware that his inflexible resolve to go to Jerusalem could very well lead to his death at the hands of his enemies there, as in fact it very nearly did. Only the swift action of the Roman commander Claudius Lysias saved him from the fury of the mob and spared him for a few more years of active service for the Lord he loved. He did not see Ephesus again; the Lord's words to him at an earlier time "*Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the nations*" was very literally to be fulfilled. He was to find himself at the other end of the Roman world; in Italy, Spain and perhaps Gaul and Britain, to sow the seed of the Gospel in those remote parts. It mattered nothing to Paul; his destiny was in the Lord's hands and it was "*equal joy to go or stay*". He desired only one thing at this moment, that these to whom he had been a pastor and minister should now hold fast the truths he had taught them and in their turn pass the flaming torch to others who would follow. There were generations yet to come who must be instructed in the truths of the faith for the promised Advent of their Lord was a long way in the distant future and in the meantime there would come in among them "*grievous wolves, not sparing the flock*" (v.29). So the preservation and onward transmission of the whole counsel of God was vitally important.

One might ask, just what is this 'counsel of God'? The short answer is that it must cover the whole range of the Christian faith, centred in

Christ. That must include the philosophy of God's purpose, the fabric of Christian doctrine, practical and devotional exhortation and the Church's commission to preach Christ in all the world for a witness. A cursory examination of the Apostle Paul's writings in the New Testament shows that of these three factors he devoted one quarter of his space to doctrine, one quarter to evangelism and the remaining half to teaching about the Christian life. That may be a clue to the relative importance that he attached to each of these three factors. It may also indicate that he felt not one of them could be ignored without serious loss to the Christian's individual progress towards maturity in Christ. The doctrinal arguments of Romans and Galatians are necessary on the one hand just as the spiritual counsel of Ephesians and Philippians are on the other.

Writing to his son in the faith, Timothy, the Apostle enjoined him to "*take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine: continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.*" (1 Timothy 4.16). Of Timothy's fellow elders in the Ephesian Church, Paul had this to say; "*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine*" (1 Timothy 5.17). This word 'doctrine' means literally 'teaching' and does not define merely an intellectual grasp of the basic principles of the Faith and of God's rule and creation, but the presentation of those things in a manner which can be understood and appreciated by the flock. Not all of the Lord's people are gifted with the ability to seek out and discover the deeper implications of God's purposes for themselves but all are able to receive these things into their hearts, if one who does understand, can explain them. After the Babylonian captivity, Ezra the scribe stood up to read the Book of the Law to the people of Jerusalem. A number of his ministers "*caused the people to understand the law so they read in the book of the law of God distinctly and gave good sense and caused them to understand the reading*" (Nehemiah 8.7-8). So Jesus, talking about much the same thing, referred to scribes instructed unto the kingdom of heaven who bring forth out of their treasures things new and old (Matt. 13.52).

Doctrinal understanding and exposition is indissolubly linked to sober Christian counsel. It is not mere philosophical speculation nor does it consist of endless arguments and differences over varying views of such subjects as the Atonement or the Covenants. The writer to the Hebrews chided some who, for the time they had been in the faith, should have been teachers of others, but instead had need that someone teach them again the first principles of the faith of Christ (Hebrews 5.12). They ought to have been at full age, mature in Christ, but instead they still needed the milk of the Word, the basic elements of faith, conversion and dedication. He did not dispute their head knowledge of the doctrines, for in the next chapter he acknowledges they had those, and he exhorts them to continue progress by building upon that foundation the things which would give them true spiritual maturity. What that involved is elaborated in Ephesians 4.11-15. Paul declares that God has given to the whole Christian society apostles, pastors, evangelists, teachers, each qualified in his own sphere, but not necessarily in all. These are to teach and edify the church as a whole and lead them *"in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God"* to the fulness of maturity; full growth in Christ.

One of the wisest men in ancient times, well versed in God's ways so far as they were then revealed, was Solomon, King of Israel. It was Solomon who said *"Wisdom is the principal thing with all thy getting, get understanding"* (Proverbs 4.7). That is qualified in the New Testament for in 1 Corinthians 13 it is laid down that love is the principal thing. Knowledge is transitory, for it is eventually superseded by clearer knowledge. The Christian graces of faith, hope and love are of the greatest consequence and of those, love is the most important. Love never faileth; it abides forever. This love is not a mere sickly sentiment; it is not an all-consuming affection for another to the exclusion of all else. It is the quality that was demonstrated by the Father when He sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. *"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3.16). This love is the power that makes for oneness and unity, among the members of the Body of Christ. *"Love one another, as I have loved you"* was our Lord's

injunction to his disciples (John 15.12). This is the force which binds believers together in one communion and in the power of which they continue in the Christian life and in the service of their Lord. *"Be like-minded"* says Paul, *"having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind"* (Phil.2.2). This love is the background against which are displayed all the graces of the Christian character. Love is to be manifested in all sincerity, says the Apostle in Romans 12; on this basis is built all those Christian qualities which are enumerated in that chapter. Some are conducive to the building up of character and the creation of a faith structure that will withstand all the powers of unrighteousness and others have to do with the outward manifestation of our inward faith. Above all things it is our love for the Father and the Son and their Word that enables us to stand fast in the evil day and do battle with all the forces of evil. *"Stand therefore"* he says again in Eph.6.13-18, *"take the whole armour of God; that you may be able to withstand in the evil day"*. Faith and prayer are elements in that armour and it is by faith and prayer that the Christian soldier will eventually win the day. All of these things constitute part of the whole counsel of God whereby we shall gain the victory.

Thirdly there is evangelism. *"Go ye into all the world"* said Jesus to the little band of disciples who were about to witness his ascension *"and preach the gospel to the whole creation"* (Mark 16. 15). That commission has never been repealed. It is still as incumbent as ever it was, to witness to the faith that is in us, each one according to ability and opportunity. It is still obligatory upon every group and community in the Christian society to let their light shine and take the message into whatever place and among whatever people that has a need. It is necessary to preach the true Gospel and to present as accurate a picture of Christ and the appeal of Christ as our own understanding will permit. Some in all sincerity will plead with the unbeliever to 'flee from the wrath to come' not realising that acceptance of Christ in fear of the consequences if the appeal is ignored, is no acceptance at all. The Lord cannot receive those who come to Him on that ground. Neither should the Name of Christ be preached as a kind of magic talisman, the confession of which ensures salvation irrespective of the degree to which Christ enters and transforms

the life. The rich young ruler found that to become a disciple of Christ involved sacrifice and self-denial, entering the same kind of life that Jesus Himself lived. During this age, God is calling out from among the nations, "*a people for his Name*", a dedicated body of believers in Christ. Their lives are completely devoted to Him, believing that at life's end, they will be with Christ. They will share with Him, as His Church, in the age to come, the work of reconciling the world to God.

Evangelism now is for the purpose of finding and gathering those who will be God's instruments for world-wide evangelism then. To use Paul's own phrase "*the saints shall judge the world*" (1 Cor. 6.2) This, so far as the Christian commission of evangelism is concerned, is 'the whole counsel

of God'. Paul knew all this, and, as he took leave of those sorrowing elders, grieved because they were to see him no more in this life, he was comforted in the thought that he had played his part and discharged his commission to the utmost of his ability. Now the torch must fall into younger hands, the destinies of the Church be guided by later converts to the Faith. He had exhorted them, he had warned them, he had comforted them. He could do no more. He left his life's work in the hands of his Master in complete peace and confidence that He would continue it and raise up other hands to administer what he must now relinquish. May God grant that we, if we find ourselves in a similar situation, have the grace and faith to do the same.

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

9. A Basket of Summer Fruit

Amos 8.1 -14

At the opening of the eighth chapter, Amos is back in his native land, Judah. His mission to the ten tribe kingdom was completed and Amaziah the apostate High Priest of Bethel had ordered him to leave the country. Amos had foretold the imminent downfall of the kingdom and carrying away of the people into captivity, a prediction that was fulfilled thirty years later. Now he must tell the people of Judah that the same fate awaited them, although more than a hundred and fifty years were to pass before that prediction was fulfilled. The one was as sure as the other. That period was to see a century of evil kings, Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. It ended with the stern condemnation of God in those final words to Zedekiah "*And thou, profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown ... I will overturn, overturn, overturn it and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him*" (Ezekiel 21.25-27). It was this, the final dispersion of Judah from the promised land, that Amos now had to declare. "*Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit*" (ch.8.1).

Here is the same formula that introduced the three symbol-visions of chapter 7, depicting the irrevocable three-stage, captivity-judgment upon the Ten Tribes. Just as irrevocable now, was the

Divine Judgment soon to come upon the Two Tribes. Although the reigns of the two God-fearing kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, had yet to come, their influence for good failed to survive their deaths and in each case the king had hardly been put in his grave before the people had turned to idolatry again. Only thirteen years after Amos delivered this message to the heedless people of Judah the youthful Isaiah saw his vision of the Lord in His Temple and received his own commission to go out and preach. The Lord at the same time warned him that they would close their eyes and ears to the appeal, because they had deliberately set themselves against God and did not wish to be converted. "*Go, and say to this people: You shall hear indeed but you shall not understand; you shall see indeed, but not perceive. For the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and be converted and I should heal them*" (Isa. 6.9-11 LXX; see also Matt. 13. 14-15, Acts 28.26-27). The Lord already knew that the case was hopeless; now the penalty of the Mosaic Covenant, laid down seven centuries previously, must most certainly be invoked. So Amos knew, as he had done when he saw the earlier visions relating to the Ten Tribes, that he must now proclaim the doom of Judah.

"Amos, what seest thou?" asked the Lord. The prophet looked again and gave the only possible reply. "A basket of summer fruit" he responded. The word indicates the last fruits of the harvest, fruits already verging upon the over-ripe and crying out for gathering. This was the end of the harvest. The fields were to be cleared after this. His Spirit-filled mind already began to perceive the meaning of the vision, and it was with sad heart that he listened to the Lord's voice confirming his fears. "*The end is come upon my people of Israel. I will not overlook their deeds any more. And the sacred songs of the Temple shall be changed into weeping in that day, saith the Lord God. And the dead shall be flung out without burial and without lamentation*" (ch. 8.2-3).

Amos knew what he had to do. He must declare this coming judgment to the people of Judah just as he had already done to the people of Samaria. Their sins were much the same; oppression of the poor, deceit and robbery, gluttony and luxurious indulgence, and above all things, neglect of God and true worship. He had got to say all over again much the same things that he had already said. And he must do so in the sure knowledge, as with his fellow-prophet Isaiah who was so soon to follow him, that the people would not hearken but would continue in their ways and would inevitably incur the judgment. For the second time he must stand in the sanctuary and announce the coming of the end.

This time it was not the idolatrous sanctuary of Bethel; it was the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Amos must have taken his stand in the outer court of the magnificent edifice, built by Solomon not much more than a couple of centuries previously. There, where king, priests and people alike were gathered and would hear him, the lowly herdsman of Tekoa delivered his last and most significant message.

That message was in two parts, divided by a still further vision, the most momentous of all. Amos probably paid two visits to the Temple, one before and one after that vision. At this moment though, he was inspired by the vision of the basket of summer fruit and the Lord's words to him in that connection. The end had come for Judah, and the Lord would not relent. More accurately perhaps, He could not. There was no basis left for finding excuse for clemency. Not long afterwards

the historian of the period wrote of those days "*Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy*" (2 Chron. 36.14-16). It was in the knowledge of that terrible condition of society that Amos went forward to deliver his last message.

The remainder of chapter 8 vv 4-14, enshrines what he said. It is a recapitulation of the same catalogue of crimes against God which he had already recited to the Ten Tribe people of Bethel. Little can be gained by dwelling on them now. Verses 4-6 refer to the oppression of the rich and powerful swallowing up the needy and buying the poor into slavery, trading dishonestly "*making the ephah small and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit*". Short weight (the ephah was a measure of capacity), overcharging and using false balances to weigh out the goods into the bargain. "*The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob*" thundered the prophet in his excess of indignation "*surely I will never forget any of their works*" (ch. 8.7). A significant expression that. The term "excellency of Jacob" or perhaps more accurately the "glory of Jacob" can refer to the Promised Land itself as the treasure inherited by the people of Israel. It can also denote the mission and office of that people to be God's witness to the world and it can be applied to the personal majesty of Israel's God. The same word is rendered 'glory' more often in these connections than "excellency". In this verse it would seem to refer to the Divine Person and majesty. Here God has sworn by Himself to indicate the permanence of His intention. In Gen. 22.16,17 He said to Abraham regarding his surrender of Isaac "*By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing ... That in blessing I will bless thee*". Commenting on this latter text, the writer to the Hebrews says "*Because God could swear by none greater, he swore by himself.*" (Hebrews 6.13) Here in Amos the Lord swears by Himself

that He will no longer overlook the transgressions of Judah and will exact due retribution.

In a rare flash of inspiration the prophet likens the coming disaster to the desolation of the land by a flood. The land will tremble, he says (8.8) and every one will lament. This destructive flood he likened to the annual inundation of the Nile. In Egypt the river flood sweeps over the land and obliterates all the land marks, but when it recedes it leaves behind the rich silt which makes possible the seed-sowing and harvest of another year. The flood of Amos not only destroys the old corrupt system; it also, like the Nile flood, has in it the promise of a new and better order of things in which right doing will take root and prosper. He is going to say more about that in chapter 9.

Now comes the most momentous aspect of this final catastrophe that is to come upon Judah, the withdrawal of the Divine word. It is because the warnings of His prophets are consistently ignored that the Lord will withdraw Himself from further communication with His people and leave them to their fate. In practice this did not occur until the eleventh hour, for Jeremiah the prophet was constant in his warnings and advice right up to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians; but after that God turned away and His voice was no more heard. Verse 9 depicts that sad situation in symbol. *"It shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day"*. Commentators habitually look for a convenient solar eclipse occurring in the time of Amos to fulfil this prediction. Several such have been claimed but this overlooks the fact that the prophecy refers to a time a hundred and fifty years later. In point of fact the allusion is a metaphor and its application and meaning is not hard to discern. This is Israel's sun, the word of God through the prophets, which is to go down prematurely and leave the nation in spiritual darkness. Micah, only a generation afterwards, saw this when he said *"the sun shall go down over the prophets and the day shall be dark over them ... for there is no answer from God"* (Micah 3.6-7). The only prophets left will be the false ones and they who have nothing to say. Jeremiah, referring to Judah at the time of this judgment, said of the nation *"Her sun is gone down while it was yet day... And the residue of them will I deliver to the sword of their enemies,*

saith the Lord" (Jer.15.9). This is the meaning of this darkening of the sun in the clear day.

Later on Isaiah was to assure the truehearted in Israel that this was not to be for ever; Israel's sun is to rise again. *"Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee"*... he cried *"Thy sun shall no more go down ... for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."* (Isa. 60.1, 20). This is to be the glorious sequel to follow after all the disciplinary judgments have been inflicted. Isaiah had a great deal to say about this, and it was built upon and an expansion of, the relatively brief outline of that glorious sequel which Amos gives, at the end of chapter 9.

The result at the time of the judgment was to be mourning and lamentation and sackcloth for the departed glory of God's ancient people as referred to in v.10. When the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar came, they destroyed the city and the Temple and laid waste the countryside and took the people captive to Babylon. Too late, the nation realized the truth of all that the prophets had told them, prophets they had ignored and despised. There was mourning, lamentation and sackcloth! *"By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, we wept, when we remembered Zion."* (Psalm 137.1) Away in the alien land they began to feel after God but the way back was necessarily hard and slow. They were now subject to an idolatrous people and power. The Temple, the centre of their worship and ritual was no more. The sacred feasts, for which the Temple was essential, could no longer be observed, at least with the ritual required by the instructions given by Moses. The Day of Atonement ceremonies, which figuratively released the people from sin annually, could not be held. The whole of their religious life and practice was thrown into disarray *"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land"* (Psalm 137.4). All that was foretold by Amos. *"The days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord and shall not find it."* (chap. 8.11-12). Eloquent words, and self explanatory, except perhaps for the somewhat cryptic expression *"from the north to the east"*. Why these particular points

of the compass? One would have thought north to south more appropriate. The word for 'east' is 'sun-rising' Was this another hint of a better time to come after the judgment? The north was always the expression used for the source of Israel's enemies. Always they came 'from the north' as indeed they did in actual fact. The Babylonians, whose country lay east of Judah, had to circumvent the intervening desert and invade the land from the north. Did this word mean that the famine of the word of God was to endure from the destruction of the nation at the hands of the invaders from the north to Israel's sun-rising at the dawn of the Millennial Day?

A final word against the idolatry that Judah had copied from Samaria, the Ten-Tribe kingdom and then Amos had finished. *"They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy God, O Dan, liveth; and the sacred road to Beer-sheba liveth, even they shall fall and never rise up again"* (v.14).

The sin of Samaria was idolatry. They had erected and maintained two centres of heathen worship, one at Bethel in the south of their territory, one at Dan in the extreme north. Another idolatrous shrine was maintained by the Two-Tribe Kingdom at Beer-sheba, at the extreme south of Judah (hence the expression 'from Dan to Beer-sheba' denoting the full length of the

Promised Land from north and south). The one at Dan was established in the days of the Judges and one of the descendants of Moses was its first priest (Judges 18). That at Bethel was set up by Jeroboam I when the Ten Tribes seceded from the united kingship of David's posterity. The 'high place' at Beer-Sheba is first mentioned in the reign of Josiah when, in his reforming zeal, he destroyed it. That it had existed from at least the time of Solomon is probable. Now Amos says that reverence rendered to these godless shrines of Dan and Beer-sheba would be done away and never restored. That prediction also was realized. After the return from the captivity there was no more worship of other gods.

So Amos turned himself about and walked out of the Temple-court. He had one more message to declare, one that foretold the dispersion of Israel throughout the world over the long period which Jesus later was to call the Times of the Gentiles. From Nebuchadnezzar to the end of this Age, Israel would never know national independence, but always be under the Divine interdict. But at the end they would return, the lesson learned and not be plucked up from their land any more. That is the heartening prospect of the prophet's last word enshrined in chapter 9.

To be continued

A PLACE PREPARED

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, and believe in me. In my Father's house are many dwellings. If it were otherwise I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you to dwell in. And if I go and prepare a place for you I shall come again and receive you to myself, that where I am you may also be." (John 14.1-3)

Of all the words of comfort Jesus uttered to his perplexed disciples on the evening before His death, these rank the highest. Highest, not only on account of the immediate occasion, but also because of the inestimable assurance they have given to Christ's followers in every generation from that day to this. He was leaving them, but leaving them for a purpose, and when that purpose had been achieved He would come back. He was going to make ready a new celestial home for them in which they would dwell with Him eternally and when it was ready He would return and take them

to that new home and that would be the consummation of all their hopes. This was to be the living hope which would sustain them and all who followed them in after days until His promised return became reality.

There is some good solid Christian doctrine in these few simple words. First of all, by implication rather than direct statement, there is the fundamental difference between the ultimate salvation of those who are members of Christ's Church and those who are not. This promise was given to, and intended for, those who in this life have been justified through faith in Him and reconciled to God. On that basis they have dedicated their lives to Him and share in all that He stands for now and all that He will do in the future. These, and these alone, constitute the 'Body of Christ', the 'Church', *"whose names are written in heaven"*, the 'saints' (sanctified ones) who will

reign with Christ as shepherds, teachers and evangelists over the nations during the age of world conversion (Rev. 20.4; 1 Cor 6.2). These enter the eternal state at the promised coming again of our Lord and in this, differ from all others of the human race. Those saved from the 'remainder of mankind' will enter that blessed state at the end of the 'Millennium'. Whatever the Father's design for the reconciled and perfected world of mankind, it will be part of a plan He has for the expansion of life throughout the whole of creation. The Church is unique because it shares with Christ at the centre of God's rule of all things.

A second aspect of this text is the implied creative activity on the part of our Lord during the time intervening between His first and second Advents. We are not to think of Him as seated idly upon some great celestial throne at the right hand of the Father until the day dawns that He must come to earth to "*judge the living and the dead*". He is doing something, preparing a place which did not formerly exist that it might be a fitting environment for His Church when the time comes for Him to take them to Himself. "*By him were all things created*"... "*All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made*" (Col.1.16; John 1.3). This shows a continuance of creative energy and brings into existence a sphere of activity and continuing life that was not there before.

Thirdly, the truth of His promise to return to earth, the long awaited and much discussed Second Advent, is substantiated. Christ definitely declared that He would come again, a coming that is to be a real coming, a coming in person, unlike His presence with His followers throughout the Age by the power of the Holy Spirit. He made it as plain as He could on one occasion. "*I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world; and go to the Father*" (John 16.28) to which He now adds, "*If I go away, I will come again*". To the disciples standing on the Mount of Olives at the Ascension, came the same positive assurance "*This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*". (Acts 1.11)

So Jesus exhorted his disciples not to let themselves be overtaken by **trouble or sorrow** at the unexpected turn of events that was about to

transpire. These would culminate in His death and wreck all their hopes. The word means to be anxious or distressed, or to be in perplexity and doubt of mind. The same word is used by Jesus recorded in John 12.27 when He said "*Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say*", and also in Gethsemane (Matt. 26.37,38). Again in a very different setting when Matthew says of Herod at the visit of the three Magi "*Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him*" (Matt. 2.3). They were not to be perplexed or doubtful or despondent at the things which now must happen. They already had belief in their Master. Oft-times He had chided them for their lack of faith; now He exhorted them to summon all the faith they could and keep in their hearts His promise that He would come again.

Perhaps He intended to give them a stimulus to faith by telling them something of the world to which He was shortly going and which they themselves would see one day. No where else in the sayings of Jesus is there so clear a picture of the celestial world as is here recorded in John's gospel. Up to this time the disciples could have had only the haziest of ideas about the realm from which our Lord had come and to which He was now about to return. As with all Jews of their day and age, their hopes for the future were centred upon an earthly kingdom over which Messiah would reign forever and they with Him. They pictured the Gentile nations as giving submission to the triumphant Jew, and to the extent that they shared the prophetic fervour of the prophet Isaiah they saw Israel as a light to the nations, declaring the salvation of God to the ends of the earth. But that is as far as their thinking went; the conception of a spiritual world of life and activity was too much for their immature minds to grasp. And now Jesus was telling them that in His Father's house there were many dwellings and somewhere among those dwellings He was going to prepare a special place for them. It may be that this expression "*my Father's house*" – His dwelling place – took some of their minds back to Psalm 104 which pictures God as inhabiting the wide expanse of the skies, stretching out the heavens like a curtain and spreading them like a tent in which to dwell (Isa. 40.22). The word 'mansions' of the AV comes from the Latin and refers to government hostels that existed at regular intervals on all the Roman

roads throughout the empire. No matter how far the traveller might journey or how wild and forbidding the country through which he was journeying there was always the hostel where he could stop at the end of the day, obtain food and shelter and a change of horses for the next day's journey. My Father's house is like that, said Jesus. There are many places in His creation where life can flourish and God be served. This earth is not the only object of the Divine plans; the destiny of those simple fishermen and peasants was to lie in realms of unimaginable splendour far distant from this mundane earth which at present was the only world they knew. Far up there beyond the arch of the heavens, beyond the light of the sun, away where the high and lofty One inhabits eternity (Isa. 57.15) the Lord was going to prepare a place for them and for all His faithful who come after them, even unto the end of the Age. To prepare a place – the word *topon* means a place marked off or destined for a particular purpose, as in Rev. 12.6 where the symbolic mother of the 'man-child' fled into the wilderness where God had "*prepared a place*" for her. Our Lord was going away to make ready the future sphere of life and activity in which his followers were to spend their never-ending resurrection lives.

There is a hint of creative power here. The Old Testament contains a celebrated passage in which Christ in His pre-human state is referred to as the Wisdom of God, personified. It tells of His work at the time of the creation of this terrestrial universe, "*The Lord God acquired me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old I was anointed from the beginning, before the earth was ... when he prepared the heavens, I was there; ... when he established a sphere upon the face of the abyss ... then I was with him as a sure workman ... rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men*" (Prov. 8.22-31). If this passage is considered with John 1 and Col. 1 in which all things which are made are said to have been made by Christ, it stands out clearly that He is and always will be the agent of the Father in all creative work. There emerges a picture of creation continuously proceeding and the events described in chapter 1 of Genesis, which tell of the creation of the earth and of man upon it, constitute just one episode in a master Plan of unimaginable magnitude. Now Jesus tells us that he is about to

embark upon another work of creation, a new world, a new and hitherto unknown order of things. This is to be the particular home of those who have proved their faithfulness to Him in this life and are consequently exalted to high office with Him for the work of the eternal future. From this home, as a centre, these will go forth to and return from their duties and activities in every part of Divine creation where they are needed. The first work will be the evangelising of the remainder of the human race here on this earth: that is to be their privilege and responsibility during the thousand years of the Millennium immediately following the Second Coming. That achievement will be crowned by the entering of all humanity – as many as can then be reached and persuaded by the appeal of the Gospel – into the eternal state. Sin banished, death unknown, all things on earth made new and all mankind ushered into the eternity of complete and undisturbed happiness. This will be the result of the work of Christ and His Church during that period. This is what Paul meant when he said that "*the saints will judge the world*". After that – who knows? The Scriptures offer no clue. It can only be taken as a certainty that life in eternity is not going to be a life of idleness or a kind of static existence in which nothing happens or is done. Activity, achievement, continuing increase in knowledge and experience must certainly be the lot of every member of Christ's Church in the 'place' He has gone to prepare for us and with the confidence we must, for the present, be content.

The prelude to all this is the Second Advent. Having prepared the place, Jesus said, He would come back to take His faithful to Himself and away to the home that He has made. This coming is a real coming and not a metaphysical one. One system of theology claims that Christ's promise of coming again was fulfilled in the judgment which came upon the Jews in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed their city and national life. That great event, final judgment and end of the world as it was for the Jews, by no means meets the Scriptural presentation of all that the Second Coming implies. Neither is it the fulfilment of Jesus' promise to come to them and be with them unto the end of the Age (John 14. 18; Matt. 28.20). That promise related to the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Second Coming includes much more than judgment on the Jews and spiritual guidance

for the Church. It involves the dissolution of the present world order that will be replaced by a world-wide rule under Christ as king. In that kingdom right behaviour will be supreme, marked by peace and love. It involves the resurrection of the dead and the final stage of human probation, for dead and living alike, during the whole period of world evangelisation, commonly called the Millennium, the reign of Christ over the earth. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15 *"He must reign, until he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death... then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father... that God may be all in all"*. The Second Advent includes all of these events over the entire period, necessary to their accomplishment.

Jesus was not talking about all these various aspects of His coming when He was conversing with His disciples on this occasion. One aspect only was in His mind, one that concerned them the most closely. *"I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also."* Not at this moment was there to be an exhaustive discourse upon the various facets of God's plan and how they converged and focussed upon the fact of the Second Advent. The disciples were grieved and saddened at the imminent departure of their Master and the abrupt severance of the fellowship and relationship that had grown up between them. What they wanted at this moment was comfort for their sorrow, assurance that their Master would be able to commune with them from the other side, and a real hope for the future consummation when they would be together with Him again. All this Jesus gave them in these brief words. John must have remembered them very intensely in much later years when he penned the inspiring words *"it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3.2). No conception of the nature of that future world, the place that Jesus will have

prepared; no idea of the form of that celestial body which Paul in 1 Cor. 15 indicates is as real as this terrestrial body, but different. We cannot yet know what we shall be but we have this assurance, we shall be like Him, and with that we can be well content. In his ecstatic vision of the union of Christ and His Church, John said *"the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready"* (Rev. 19.7). Poetic language, but how expressive. That promised union between the Lord and His faithful ones which He guaranteed by the words *"I am coming again and will receive you to myself"* was wrought by John many years later into this thrilling picture of a celestial marriage. The Bridegroom has come to the earth to claim His Bride and take her back with Him to be presented before His Father. The new home is ready, and the host of heaven raises its voice in acclamation *"as the voices of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters and as the voice of mighty thunderings"* (Rev 19.6). Did ever an earthly pair receive such a tumultuous welcome? This is the exaltation of the Church, the climax to all her earthly experiences, the introduction to her future home and future work. This is where the outworking of God's Plan takes a tremendous step forward. *"The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ"* (Rev. 11.15) and the message of the Gospel goes out to all men with a power and effect it has never known before. This is when the Lord Christ and His Church, the "Spirit and the Bride" send out their call and challenge for conversion and loyalty and allegiance to all mankind, saying *"Come, whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22.17). All these things are involved in that quiet utterance of Jesus the night before His crucifixion. Spoken to the twelve, intended for all who at any day or time have named the name of Christ, and who trust in the word of His promise that when He has prepared that heavenly home He will come again and receive us to Himself.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5.3). Why did Christ call this condition blessed?

It is, for one thing, the only condition of peace. It delivers us from all bondage to what others think of us. Their criticism does not wound us. We know ourselves too well for that. The feeling of inferiority is lifted, for we know that all we can

ever be, is of His grace, and that is ours to the full. We cease to care about the applause of men, for the real story of whatever good we do, is all God's work in us and through us. But free from ourselves we can see and value others. The worst barrier to real fellowship is gone, for the thing that isolates us is pride. (The "Herald of Christ's Kingdom.")

THE SAVING POWER OF GOD!

*A Study of the
Work of Christ*

3. The Wrath of God

A study of the work of Christ to bring salvation to the human race must consider how God's wrath operates. Our view of God's character must not be obscured by our experience of human anger nor our judgement warped by what goes on in human society. Human emotions do not work properly and have deteriorated like everything else in our lives because of the effect of sin upon our nature and because we live in an environment which rebels against God's law. Even so-called 'righteous indignation' that is sometimes expressed by Christian believers, is greatly distorted by our selfish nature to retaliate and so uphold its own reputation.

In the Old Testament the wrath of God is linked to the covenants with His people. He showed His wrath against the people of Israel when they broke the terms of the Covenant. A classic example of this occurred immediately after receiving the 'Law Covenant' at Mount Sinai, when the Israelites made an idol in the shape of a golden calf and worshipped it, as if it was the god who had delivered them from Egypt (Exodus 32.10, 11). Three verses later, in the AV it says that God repented of what He was going to do in His indignation and anger. The NIV translates this "*Then the LORD relented*". Cole in the IVP Tyndale commentary suggests this is describing the actions of God in human terms. God's promises and warnings are conditional upon the human response to them (Ezekiel 33.13-16). Moses did not alter God's mind in this matter but was seeking to know what God was thinking. Far from yielding to the temptation of making a name for himself, Moses was prepared to be 'wiped out' so that all Israel might continue as God's people. Never was he nearer to the heart of God than when he stood with Him on Horeb. God waits to forgive and at that moment He was able to forgive because the true leader of Israel came so near to expressing the 'mind of the Lord'. No member of our fallen race was ever more worthy to catch a glimpse of the glory of the Lord (Exodus chapters 33 and 34).

Much later in their history, another leader when searching for God, discovered that unless they reformed their worship and behaviour, Israel would be subject to the wrath of God. Josiah, king

of Judah at the time of Jeremiah, realised how deeply God's people had sinned against Him and therefore were due for punishment. (2 Kings 22.13). On behalf of the people of Israel, Josiah demonstrated contrition of heart and did much to reform them. God's longsuffering nature responded to this repentance. For a time the punishment did not fall upon Judah but as God's people slipped further away from Him the wrath finally came in the days of Zedekiah. This is how God's wrath has operated throughout human history. It has never descended upon "the poor groaning creation" without mercy. From Israel's point of view, God continually expressed His covenant (*chesed*) love towards His people. It was that very love which allowed Israel to go into exile and experience the harsh brutality of 'the nations' around them. That wrath was not the vindictive cruelty of pagan gods. When the 'wrath' had done its work then it was removed in His own inimitable way and Israel returned to their own land. Israel's prophets began to appreciate the difference between Divine wrath and human anger when God spoke through Hosea (11.9) "*I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God not man, the Holy One in your midst and I will not come and destroy.*"

Through all human history, God's wrath has rested upon the world. Yet in spite of appearances He has been silently expressing His great love to all people. Paul wrote "*that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*" God intends to lift the wrath upon Adam and his descendants (Romans 8.21; 11.32). God was never indifferent to the plight of 'the nations' who were alien to the covenant with Israel. This is demonstrated in the Old Testament by the story of Jonah where the people of Nineveh were about to be judged for their wickedness. However, after listening to the preaching of the prophet the disaster was averted because the king and his people truly repented of their sin. (Jonah 3.5, 10). If judgment was a matter of 'cause and effect in a moral universe', as Dodd wrote, then the whole human race would have been destroyed from the Earth long ago. In His great mercy God provides

opportunities for turning away from sin. In his rebellion, man frequently ignores those opportunities to repent. In the beginning, the wrath of God fell upon the whole race of mankind and the awful consequences of man's rebellion have stricken millions of innocent people. That suffering has been the direct consequence of human behaviour and is more apparent in the world today than ever it was. When the curse of Eden is lifted and Earth's millions are restored to life in the resurrection they will realise that God 'meant it to them for good'. Not a drop of blood has been spilt nor has a tear been shed that will not be recompensed a hundred fold in God's paradise on Earth. The penalty for man's sin has been paid for in Christ. The only reason for God's wrath is to demonstrate to mankind in general, and to its blind leaders in particular, that sin is wrong, illogical and results in nothing but misery and death.

Wrath is God's personal (though never malicious) reaction against sin. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. In chapter 1 of Romans, Paul argues clearly that even those outside the Law Covenant were without excuse in their disobedience to His law. There is much less about wrath and anger in the New Testament and when it is discussed, it seems to carry less of the violence of earlier days. Nevertheless the principles that operate in the exercise of wrath, in justice and mercy are consistent through Old and New Testament and in the words of Jesus and writings of Paul. Jesus said that those who suffer sudden disasters are not worse than the rest of us (Luke 13.1-5). It is also wrong to infer that natural disasters such as flood and earthquake are examples of God's wrath directed specifically to individuals or communities. Had not mankind as a whole rebelled against God they would have learned how to avoid those 'natural developments' in the Earth. What is really important in the New Testament consideration of wrath, is that God Himself has taken the initiative by providing a means to remove that wrath, therefore no one was needed to plead with Him. Intercession is another subject. He clearly does not intend to be frustrated in His desire to enlighten all human beings with truth (1 Timothy 2.4). Religious Jews of the first century could not understand this. They were certain that God's punishment would fall on any who did not obey their conception of the Law.

They thought that their strivings to keep the Law of Moses would exempt them from God's wrath. Nor could they understand how the woes of Isaiah 53 could fall upon the Messiah who was expected to remove the wrath of God. There was a sense in which Jesus bore all the wrath of Judgment Day and in doing so opened the way for all under wrath to receive new life.

There is more about the wrath of God in the Book of Revelation than anywhere else in the New Testament. There are vivid descriptions of God's wrath being poured out on the wicked works of mankind and in fact destroying all that is evil in His universe. But all that 'pouring out of wrath' is part of God's process of shutting up the human race "*in the prison of their disobedience*" because it is God's purpose to show mercy on all mankind. Barrett suggests that God brought men into a position that merits nothing but His wrath so that His relations with them may be marked by nothing but mercy. In Romans 1 (vv 24, 25, 27) Paul shows how God punishes mankind for its wrongdoing, but that then places Him in a position to demonstrate His mercy (Romans 11.32). Those of God's creation that have never done wrong cannot experience His mercy and only those who know they are sinners can know how much they are loved. The righteous '*need no forgiveness*' (Luke 15.7) and cannot know what it is to be forgiven. That does not make God the author of sin. Our first parents were duly warned of the consequences of sin. They were not compelled to disobey the rules that had been laid down. That was their choice. Anyone of their descendants might have disobeyed Him in the same way if they had been in the same position. There is no escape from the responsibility of sin. All members of Adam's race sin because they inherit a disposition to do so and that is Paul's point in Roman 5. 12. We sin because we readily fall to Satan's temptations. Nevertheless we dare not suggest that every sin we commit we do so because we can't help it. Our fallen human nature readily blames others for what we ourselves do wrong. Failing all else we blame God for making us as we are. The mechanics of original sin have been the subject of many debates through the ages. Neither science nor theology can explain how we inherit this natural inclination to sin but our experience teaches us that we definitely have it. What we do, say and think impulsively

demonstrates to us that we are in rebellion against the goodness of God. Modern philosophy and psychology argue to the contrary but they are unconvincing. The result of teaching young folk that guilt and sin do not exist is becoming more apparent among many in modern society. How early in life we are aware of wrongdoing is an interesting point. Perhaps Paul touches on this in his argument that mankind was not aware of sin till the Law of Moses was given (Romans 7.7-11).

Children clearly enjoy life more when they are lovingly shown the boundaries of behaviour that they must not cross. They discover that anti-social behaviour causes the removal of the benefits of society. They find that unkind actions cause the withdrawal of the very love they crave. In the same way Christian believers learn that God is accessible when wrath is removed. This occurs

when their hearts are contrite and they seek His forgiveness. Then they may know Him and receive His friendship with unbounded joy. Sadly our Heavenly Father's anger is misunderstood. He is said to treat sinners in a way that Christian parents would never act towards their child.

God's wrath is real, it is just and it is kind. It lingers only long enough to teach us how He wants us to live. God's wrath should never be confused with the kind of suffering that He uses to develop characters of compassion. God can be angry like any good Christian parent, but that anger is prompted by love which in the end restores the sinner. That love was demonstrated by the giving its greatest and best gift. *"for God so loved the world that he gave His only son"* – our Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord, to remove that which caused the wrath.

THE EFFECT OF EVERY VISION

*A discourse of
forty years ago*

"We see not our signs. There is no more any prophet, neither is there amongst us any that knoweth how long." (Psalm 74.9)

In those few words, beautiful even in their pessimism, there is summed up all the despair and all the hopelessness of a generation that had lost its youthful enthusiasm. In early flush of youth they had eagerly embraced all the good promises of the prophets and looked forward with earnest longing to the day when those golden words would be fulfilled in dazzling reality. They had dreamed dreams and seen visions, and in all those dreams and visions they had pictured themselves as the favourites of God, called and chosen by Him to be His representatives in the days when He would arise to rule the nations. They ardently desired a Kingdom of righteousness upon the earth and the overthrow of evil. They loved the Name of the Lord and they wanted to see that beloved Name cleared of the misunderstandings and false charges that had clustered about it. They had given themselves to God and He had accepted them for His own, to be a covenant people and a light to the nations. So life had become a different thing to them. Of course it was unthinkable that they should ever change their attitude! They had but to wait in the joy of this new found relationship and when the day of deliverance dawned their dearest hopes

would be gratified.

The years went by and a new and unknown factor emerged. Life was found to contain so much more than was imagined in those early days when the plans and promises of God had been so eagerly embraced. There was disappointment and disillusionment lying in wait to test faith and endurance. The insidious suggestion had been made that a more complete knowledge would reveal the instability of the foundation upon which those earlier golden visions had been built. There was a realisation that many of the fond expectations had not materialised and, perhaps worst of all, there was the onset of old age, with its weakening of natural powers and increasing difficulty of retaining the intellectual understanding of earlier years. What wonder that these things manifested themselves in a growing impatience with the enthusiasm of such prophets as remained in the land and a peevish insistence *"there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long."* (RSV)

We can sympathise with those disappointed Israelites of old, for we ourselves face a very similar situation. Things have turned out so differently from what was expected and some begin to doubt the certainty of earlier years. There was so much zeal and energy expended in those

days, so much time and money given to a work that seemed worth while, so much organising and building, and what has it all come to? Was it so much a work of the Lord as was thought ...?

Nay, who are we that we presume to question the wisdom of the Great Shepherd? Shall the thing formed say of Him that formed it "Why have you made me like this?" Shall a servant say to his Master "Why do you do this?" It is true that we are told to say, when we have done all that we can "*we are unprofitable servants*," but nowhere are we told to stop serving Christ and to say "this is unprofitable service". We may not have perceived every aspect of God's plan with unquestioned accuracy but then a great many of God's children throughout the Christian era have been in that same position. If we have grown weary of deferred hopes it is not because our Lord has grown weary of us. Neither is it necessarily that we are inconstant or changeable. It is more probable that we are uncertain.

Perhaps it was inevitable. How impossible it would have been in those early days to describe the world as it is now; a world of travel, television and computers. We live in a society where less than five percent of the people go to places of worship and where technology, cold, passionless and inhuman, has been enthroned as god and lord. How difficult it would have been to outline in detail the many events that must occur in the affairs of the nations before the Kingdom can come! Surely it was Divine love as well as Divine wisdom that kept closed a portion of the veil concealing the future. Enough was revealed to inspire the minds and awaken the enthusiasm of those who were to go out as heralds of the Kingdom but withheld from their minds a mass of detail which could not

become a live issue for several generations.

The prophets have not failed us. The Holy Spirit is still active in the work of God, quickening the minds of His people and showing them visions of things yet to come as the time becomes due for those things to be understood. The drama of world history has stepped up its pace many times over in these last decades of the twentieth century. The succession of events is more rapid, the significance of each international crisis of greater moment; the possibilities of each situation become more far-reaching.

We see with our own eyes that of which our fathers in the faith told us, the breaking-up of a world order preparatory to the establishment of the Kingdom of God's Son. We see the land of promise and prophecy slowly becoming caught between the spheres of influence of those Powers. We see the Land of Promise as Jacob takes to himself his ancient inheritance. We perceive these things and we know what they portend. When the faint hearted children of Israel came to Ezekiel with their complaint "*the days grow long and every vision comes to nought*" the Lord gave him a word for them. We can take that word to heart, for history has repeated itself. "*Tell them therefore, Thus says the Lord God;... the days are at hand, and the fulfilment of every vision.*" (Ezekiel 12.22, 23 RSV). Let us give more earnest heed to the sure word of prophecy, for now, in the world's Saturday night, it speaks with clear voice of the things that are yet to be. As we see those things unfold on the screen of world history, we shall know of a surety that our faith has been well founded and that to us belongs the word "*He who endures to the end will be saved*".

Echoes of the Past – BSM 1941

In this day of rush and hurry and busy activity everywhere, if we are not careful, we shall allow ourselves to become too much absorbed in the doing even of right and proper things, to wait upon God. The strain of 'going to it' may become infectious, and pass from mundane things to the spiritual sphere, and crowd the avenues of life with many things by no means bad. Good things can become injurious if they destroy that peace and quietude of the inner life, and make the child of

grace forget his God and Father. Things are not necessarily done by rush and bustle. Spring glides in from day to day quite smoothly. The harvest matures without din and noise. The final conquest of evil comes "*not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.*" Zech. 4.6.

Shut out the throb of this busy world at least once each day and go alone with God, and there learn to be still, while the tension eases off. You will have grown stronger in that quiet place.

THE FEASTS OF THE RESTORATION

That period of time which elapsed between the return from Babylon to rebuild the Temple in the first year of Cyrus and the completion of the reforming work of Nehemiah a century later is known as the Restoration. The beginning of this period saw a mixed company of fifty thousand enthusiasts cross the desert and settle in Judea and lay the foundations of the new Jewish State. The end of the period saw that State established and organised, resolute in its adherence to the laws of God and confident in its avowed mission to be the elect nation which should receive the Messiah and under His rulership extend the dominion of righteousness over all the earth. The fact that even during that one century the greater part of the time had been characterised by indifference to their Divine calling and slothfulness with respect to their mission did not seem to have occurred to them. They looked more at the highlights of their experience when the voices of their prophets or the exhortations of their rulers spurred them on to positive action. They were able to exercise somewhat of their lost faith in embarking upon the work of God and giving praise at the outcome.

These occasional outbursts of active zeal for the accomplishment of the purpose for which they had come into the land were marked by celebratory feasts, convocations of the people at which God was praised and offered fervent protestations of faith and loyalty. Three such feasts are recorded. The first was a great observance of the Feast of Tabernacles on the occasion of their entering the land. At this time there was praise and thanksgiving to God for His mercy and manifested power in the deliverance from Babylon. The Feast of Tabernacles was originally a commemoration of the escape from Egypt and the sojourn in the wilderness of Sinai and was therefore appropriate at this the second great deliverance in the history of Israel. The second, twenty-two years later, was to dedicate the completed Temple and celebrate the first Passover that could have been observed with the full ritual since Solomon's Temple had been destroyed seventy years previously. The third, another Feast of Tabernacles, seventy years later still, was when Nehemiah the reformer had swept the land clear of its association with the pagan nations round about and solemnly pledged the

people to a renewal of the original covenant made by the hand of Moses at Sinai. In a very real sense the nation at that moment repudiated the misdeeds and faithlessness of their fathers from the entry into the land under Joshua to their forcible expulsion from the land under Nebuchadnezzar, during nearly a thousand years of Israel's history and pledged themselves to start again. The fact that not so very long afterwards, when Nehemiah and the prophets had gone the way of all flesh, they relapsed into indifference and godlessness again does not militate against their sincerity at this moment. And in any case there was never a time after this when there was not at least a remnant in each generation keeping alive the ideal and the promise, maintaining faith in the eventual coming of Messiah and watching constantly for His appearing.

So the fifty thousand left Babylon with all their possessions, probably in December of the year 538 BC arriving in Judea during the following April. They came with joy and gladness, with music and singing, for the time of servitude was ended and they were now entering into freedom, a liberty in which they would always serve the Lord their God in their own land and nothing would ever go wrong again. And in all their rejoicing they quite forgot the solemn warning of the long since dead prophet Isaiah, who foreseeing this day spoke of this same gladness but coupled with it an injunction. "*Depart, depart, go out thence, touch no unclean thing, go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord*" (Isa. 52.11). They were always to remember that they were the custodians of the sacred vessels of God, representing His truth and His service, and they were to keep themselves clean and uncontaminated from the practices and worship of the people of the land. In later days they forgot both of these injunctions and suffered accordingly.

So it is with the Christian today. There is a very real sense in which he comes out of Babylon when, in his Christian life, he finds it necessary to leave an environment which misrepresents the character and purpose of God. He departs bearing the sacred vessels of God's will, with perhaps a clearer and purer understanding of the faith. Perhaps too he has a better realisation of his relationship to his

Lord and dedication to His service. Isaiah's warning comes down the centuries, having thus become free, remain unspotted from the world, undefiled from wrong ideas and behaviour formerly practised. It is so easy, as the years go by, to relapse into the former state without realizing it. *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage"* (Gal. 5.1). It is always true that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

In those early days there was no flaw in the devotion and single-mindedness of those warriors for God. They spent about three months settling their families into their chosen homes, building or rebuilding their houses, accommodating their flocks and herds, and getting their land under cultivation. Then in the seventh month, September/October of 537 BC, they gathered as one man to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles according to the ritual (Ezra 3.1-7). They had no Temple, no Altar on which to sacrifice, no Most Holy into which the High Priest could take the blood of the Sin Offering and so make reconciliation for the sins of the people. There were only the ruins of Solomon's magnificent Temple, lying as they had been left by the Babylonians fifty years previously. There could be no Day of Atonement ceremonies, no presentation of an offering for sin to God, for the place where Atonement could be made was no longer there. But there was one thing they could do; they could offer sincere thanksgiving to God for the blessings they did have, the blessings of freedom to live their lives in their own land and to build anew the Temple where sacrifices could be offered and the covenant renewed. There was Joshua the High Priest, of the line of Aaron, a High Priest who had never yet been able to execute the duties of his sacred office. There too was Zerubbabel, of the royal line, the legal king of Israel who had not, and never would be able to reign as king, but only act as the Persian appointed governor of Israel responsible to Cyrus, King of Persia. These two stood up and built an altar on which burnt offerings could be offered. It is almost certain that they built that altar on the very spot in the ruined Temple where Solomon's great altar of sacrifice once stood, and by doing so demonstrated their faith that one day soon, that Temple would

rise anew.

So they offered their burnt offerings, symbols of thanksgiving and devotion. As the smoke of the sacrifices ascended up into the still air towards God, they looked up in faith and hope that at last He would redeem His promise to restore the sovereignty of the nation and give them freedom from the Gentile yoke of Persia. From that they went on, into the seven day ritual of the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 16.13-15) which told them to rejoice in the produce of the land and the labour of their hands which had been blessed of the Lord, and to give Him thanks for His bountiful provision. There was as yet no produce of the land and no results of labour; they had only been in there three months. It is evident that their observance of this feast at this time was not a thanksgiving for blessings already received, but for blessings to come. They gathered together to express their faith in the coming fulfilment of Divine promise. God would be as good as His word.

Here is a lesson for us. It is possible to defer acknowledgment for the Lord's bounties until they have actually been received. It's something like waiting for a Christmas present to be delivered before demonstrating our friendship for the giver. How much better to express our feelings toward Him before the loaves and fishes are distributed and to be thankful, loyal and loving not because of what He has given, but because we know that in His goodness He will provide. The Psalmist bids us praise the Lord because *"it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves"* and we owe everything to Him.

Two years later the foundation of the new Temple was laid. It had taken that time to assemble the materials – cedar wood from Lebanon, stone from the Judean quarries, gold and silver purchased by the contributions of the people. In the spring of 535 BC the work was started. Priests and Levites with trumpets and cymbals joined the singers in praising the Lord *"because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever. And all the people shouted with a great shout, but many of the Priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first Temple, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy"* (Ezra 3.11-12). Those old men, recalling the glories of Solomon's Temple as it stood in the days of their childhood, wept because of the desolation

they had seen throughout their lives. They could not bring themselves to share the bright vision of the enthusiastic youngsters who now looked forward to the glories of the new. A very human failing, and so understandable. Who amongst those who have grown old and grey in the faith does not look back with nostalgia to the labour and triumph and glory of earlier days. Yet we fail to enter into the youthful enthusiasm of those who never knew those days. They may, in their turn, go through the same sequence of expectation and disappointment, of optimism which may be dimmed by the experience of later years. Surely our Lord looks down and understands and allows the later sadness, as well as the earlier joyfulness, to play their part in forming character, which makes the sincere disciple ready for the Divine purposes at the last.

Sadly, the enthusiasm waned, the shouts of joy faded into silence. The work of Temple building declined. The enemies of Israel, the hated Samaritans, plotted to hinder the work. Ezra 4 tells the story. Finally, the work ceased altogether. Sixteen years later the unfinished foundations were all that remained of the hopes and expectations of the beginning. Cyrus the benefactor of the Jews was long since dead, killed in battle in the East. Two successive kings of Persia had hindered and finally stopped the work (Ezra 4.24). The people had accepted the position and turned to their own interests, planting and building, farming and trading. The House of God lay desolate.

Then, in the second year of Darius, King of Persia, prophets arose again in Israel. Two young men, Haggai and Zechariah, came to the front and re-awakened the nation's lost enthusiasm. Heedless of the possible wrath of the king they set about the work with renewed vigour. It was not long before the Samaritans were complaining again, but this time the reaction was different. Darius investigated the Jews' claim that they were acting under mandate given by Cyrus. He found that their assertion was correct and promptly authorized the resumption of the work, threatening the Samaritans with dire penalties if they continued their opposition. The totally unexpected had happened, they had challenged the lion, and behold it was only a lamb! After four years of unflagging labour the Temple was finished and dedicated.

They could not have done it without faith in the leadership and the protective power of God. That

celebrated chapter in the Book of Hebrews, chapter 11, extols the power of faith. We, brethren, says the writer of that letter in chapter 10, have access to the Father by a new and living way, through Christ, but in order to avail ourselves of it we must "*draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith*" (Heb. 10.20). To demonstrate the spiritual power resident in faith he occupies the whole of the 11th chapter with examples, taken from old time, of the mighty works done by men of God in the power of their faith. He might well have included the faith of Joshua, Zerubbabel, Haggai and Zechariah which brought about the building and the dedication of that Temple. These must have been examples of whom he says, "*the time would fail me to tell*" (Heb. 11.32). There were so many of them. And here is the lesson for the Christian. These men withstood opposition, obstruction and discouragement, and triumphed because of a fixed and inflexible faith that God was with them. Wherefore, he says in chapter 12, seeing we also are encircled by so great a company of witnesses, let us in our turn cast away the things which hinder, and run with patience, the course that is before us. "*Ye have not yet resisted unto blood*" he says "*striving against sin*". You have not yet come to the greatest of your testing. As life goes on, the proving of your faith becomes increasingly severe and crucial, and all to the end that at the last you will be revealed as pure gold, having no flaw, fit for the Master's future work. "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*" said James (4.7). That is what those believing sons of Israel did in that day of the Temple building, and in so doing set an example for all who should afterwards follow in their steps.

The time now was the beginning of the first month of the year, the time of Passover. What was more natural than that they should organize and conduct a Passover feast that would stay long in their memories, a Passover that would go down in history. It was in the spirit of this great awakening of faith and zeal that they kept this Passover, perhaps one of the most memorable that Israel had ever known. It was memorable because it made so deep an impression upon the minds of all who participated. It made that impression because it meant so much more to them than did an ordinary Passover. The usual year-by-year celebration reminded them in a perfunctory sort of way of their ancestors' deliverance from Egypt, but it had

grown to be a custom having some historical interest but that did not touch daily life very closely. This Passover was different. It denoted something more than their own recent deliverance from Babylon. It spoke of each individual's deliverance from the bonds of apathy and indifference that had well nigh cost them the loss of their favoured standing before God. It marked their entrance into a new life, a life in which God and His holiness were to be placed first and become the centre around which all of life's actions and activities were to operate. The glowing words of Zechariah had taken firm root in their hearts, and they could not wait for what might seem to them, the far distant Messianic Age, to realise their fulfilment, even although the real application of those words is to that Age. They must apply them to themselves at once, and they did. "In that day" he had said, "*shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.*" Everything in life, whether normally finding its place in secular or sacred use, is to be holy to God. "Whatsoever ye do" said the inspired Apostle at a later date "*do all to the glory of God*". So that Passover became a time of renewed dedication of life, consecration of heart, to the service of the Lord of Hosts.

There was a final Feast of the Restoration, but that was not to be until seventy long years had elapsed and faith had dwindled and died once more. In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I, king of Persia, Nehemiah the king's cup-bearer, obtained leave of absence to visit Jerusalem on a reforming mission. He found the Temple deserted, the people sadly contaminated by alliances and association with the Samaritans and other peoples of the land and Jerusalem itself still far from being the city of God's holiness. The old heroes of the early days, Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah were dead. Later governors had not concerned themselves about the spiritual welfare of the people; the present High Priest, Eliashib, grandson of Joshua, was disloyal to his commission and no fit leader in the things of God. Nehemiah's reforming methods were not like those of Haggai and Zechariah. He was a secular ruler, appointed governor of the province by the king of Persia, and he used his political authority to the full in reorganizing Judea into a theocratic state. The

principles of his work dominated Judean policy for many centuries afterward. With characteristic vigour he rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and expelled the aliens. The people seem to have accepted the reforms with relief and approval. Perhaps those seventy years' slow decline from the high principles and whole-hearted dedication to God of Zerubbabel's generation was leading to the realization that all was not well with Jewry and a return to the ancient faith was more than overdue. At any rate, following this thorough cleansing of the nation, there was once again a great Feast of Tabernacles (Neh.8). At this the original Covenant made with Moses at Sinai was reaffirmed and re-adopted; all the leaders of the people solemnly signed a declaration that they and the people would abide by it. "*And there was very great gladness*".

So the story ends in those eventful chapters, eight to ten of Nehemiah. "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*" he said to them. How true that is! This is the joy that comes from a full and sincere consecration of heart and life to the Lord. It requires a clear and definite separation from the interests and distractions of earth, the "people of the land". It needs a firm, unyielding resistance to every opposing and seductive influence of the enemies of our faith. This is the joy that will give us the strength to overcome. We must be like Elijah who ate of the food provided by God in his time of extremity, and who went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. So if we reach out to take every spiritual provision that is made for our needs and maintain faith, zeal and determination, we will remain unshaken by all those things by which the earth is being shaken today. We shall see, at the last, the fruits of our faith in the coming to earth of that heavenly Jerusalem where death is to cease and all sorrow and sighing are to flee away.

There is a great lesson for us in all of this; a great doctrinal truth that we must take to ourselves. It is that cleansing must precede consecration, faith and zeal precede a place in the Divine purpose. It was vital that the Apostles exhorted the generation that witnessed Pentecost, to repent and be converted so that times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3.19). There is a great work of Temple building going on during this Age but God cannot use anyone except they are first cleansed from contact with the people of

the land. They must be separated completely to His service and be animated by that spirit. Then belief and enthusiasm will enable them to be mighty through God in the doing of His work. The powers of evil may threaten and forbid, but it is the spirit that trusts in the abounding power of God Most High, that will defy the forces of unrighteousness. Then we may lay hands to God's work in full confidence that He will defend and prosper, and that He will be triumphant at last. Once we are

fully persuaded, as Israel was persuaded, by Haggai and Zechariah, that God's righteousness must assuredly prevail at the end, and all the forces of evil will be vanquished and flee away, the battle, so far as we are concerned, is won. We shall stand and see the Temple completed, and know that in that Sanctuary, the Lord of all, will find a dwelling place and a place of meeting with all nations.

Gainsborough House continues to progress in various ways. In October the retirement centre had a full resident capacity of ten. During the winter months three of these have reached the end of their earthly journey – in November, Ned Darke and in February, Rachel Jelous and Albert Hudson. We also greatly miss Gwen May who was a trustee. From its inception Gwen worked hard for the retirement centre, using resources, energy and remarkable skills. The 'Gainsborough Family' needs our prayers at this time.

The trustees of the Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust believe that as resources become available they should continue to develop existing buildings into single and double flats. Applications for these will always be welcome. Some friends may wish to consider 'short stays' rather than permanent residence.

Gainsborough is a large Victorian house with flats surrounding a pleasant courtyard. It has communal lounges and a dining room, a library and a fine garden. Milborne Port is a pleasant little town near Sherborne and Yeovil. Residents are cared for by a house-keeper, Corrinne Vaughan and her assistant Rose-Marie Turnbull who lives on the premises. If you would like further details please write to the Secretary, Derrick Nadal, 4 Manor Gardens Barnstone Nottingham NG 13 9JL. Bookings may be made direct to Mrs Vaughan.

Christian African Relief Trust (CART) has issued an annual report which contains much of interest concerning the plight of our brethren in Africa and what is being done to help them. During 1999, 30 large containers were sent to countries on that continent carrying many thousands of boxes, each filled with food, clothing, medicines, books and magazines. Many large items such as sewing machines, typewriters, tools and materials were also sent to help them help themselves. Much has been sent to help children including educational facilities. Jacob L. Knight (Liberia) writes: "I once more greet you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Besides 647 boxes of clothing, shoes, bedding, household items, spectacles, soap toiletries

and education materials the following items were unloaded: paper, typewriters, computers, aquaboxes, toys, sewing machines, bicycles, organ, chairs, blackboard, carpet, sweets, toothbrushes and TV. We distributed 100 boxes of clothes and 40 boxes of soap to three centres where hundreds of displaced persons have been going hungry because of the outbreak of factional fighting. I was able to serve over a hundred displaced people and children several canned foods. Some abandoned children were able also to receive five boxes of clothes and some soap. I was delighted to give sewing machines to eight villages which they highly appreciated. The machines were given with the intention that the sisters in those villages will learn how to sew which will ease their mending and sewing clothes problems ..."

In the collection of items there has always been the need for storage. What began in farm barns moved into a warehouse in Huddersfield. More recently, that had to be vacated and the Lord provided a more suitable warehouse in the same town. In order to make full use of its facilities the Trustees felt led to purchase this building and they wait on the Lord concerning the full price that must be paid before the end of 2000. Anything that friends feel led to give in this respect will be most gratefully received. Cheques should be made payable to CART. Details for the collection of materials may be obtained from the Secretary, Guildford G. Tompkins, White Gates, Tinker Lane, Lepton Huddersfield, HR8 0LR or contact Beresford King-Smith on 0121 355 5018.

This is real charity and every penny donated goes towards sending the needed goods to Africa. All administration costs are met by the Trustees. The large organising work of handling and packing is done voluntarily. Distribution in African countries is carefully monitored. In spite of all the favourable publicity about western aid, African men, women and children still go hungry, thirsty, unclothed and remain in desperate need of food, clothing, medicine and other necessities of life.

KISH -CITY OF THE ANCIENTS

*The Voice of
Archaeology*

The first eleven chapters of Genesis, covering about one half of the entire span of human history down to the present, are tantalising in their brevity. So little is revealed of all that was done during that long space of nearly four thousand years. The only historic events related are those of the Flood and the Tower of Babel. Even so, Genesis is the only existing written record of those days, for the earliest records available outside the Bible go back only about five centuries before Abraham; everything before that is blank. There are traditions and legends but these are vague and visionary, unlike the forthright statements of Genesis, and of little help. Only the spade of the archaeologist, digging up the remains of long-buried ancient cities, can tell us anything about the people who lived and died during the thousand years or so immediately following the Flood but sometimes such discoveries do throw a little light on the Bible story.

Such is the case with the ancient city of Kish, six miles east of Babylon. Kish disappeared from history nearly three thousands years ago, known only by reference in later written tablets. It lay concealed under the ground until the early years of this century, when it was excavated by Assyriologists L. C. Watelin and Stephen Langdon over a series of years between 1925 and 1934. They found the remains of buildings, palaces and temples going back to an earlier date than any other known Sumerian city. It would appear, so far as present knowledge goes, that Kish is – or was – the oldest city in the world.

The interest to the Bible student is that Kish was so near to Babylon – only six miles – which in Genesis is indicated as being the first place where men settled after the Flood, the site of the celebrated Tower of Babel. On the testimony of records and traditions, Kish was in existence when history begins, accepted as being the site of the beginning of Sumerian civilisation. It was the first civilised community to appear upon earth. Babylon as a city came later but it is certain that there was a settlement of some sort where Babylon and the famous Tower later stood at an extremely early date. Several authorities state that Babylon was originally a holy place built as a dwelling-place for the gods. The original Sumerian name meant ‘the

place of life’ and at a later time ‘the gate of the gods’ which was also the meaning of the still later Semitic name ‘*Bab-ilu*’ which became the Hebrew ‘Babel’. One is led to wonder if in fact the expression in Genesis 11 “*let us build a city and a tower*” refers to the Tower around which Babylon was built later and Kish, the city near by which may have housed the workers and devotees associated with the Tower. The Scripture says “*they left off to build a city*” but says nothing about the Tower. In point of fact the Tower was completed and a few centuries later a magnificent Temple to Marduk, the god of Babylon, erected adjacent; both buildings stood until the coming of the Greek empire under Alexander a few centuries before Christ.

This association of Kish with Babylon is supported by the fact that Kish, the earliest of all the city-states of the Sumerians, was the political head of them all for a greater length of time than any of the other cities. What is known as the “Sumerian King List” – a historical record of early times compiled in the 17th century BC, declares that after the Flood “rulership descended from Heaven” and that Kish was the first city to rule the land. This must have been after the passing of several centuries. It would take such time for the sons of Noah to increase in numbers sufficiently to form communities capable of building cities like this. The reference to rulership having descended from heaven is interesting. Two of the earliest kings bore names with significant meanings; “Palakinatim” signified “reign of righteousness” and “Nangishlishma” meant “may God listen with pleasure”. Another important factor concerns the relics of those very ancient times, so far discovered, refer only to one god, An, the God of Heaven. None of the other gods, that figure so prominently in later inscriptions, are mentioned. Does this point to a time when polytheism had not as yet developed, and these descendants of Noah were still worshipping the God of their great ancestor? Warlike instruments and weapons are also absent from the remains, as though the earliest days of Kish were set at a time when men had not yet begun to quarrel and fight between themselves.

A number of skeletons of men who lived at the time, have been brought to England for expert

examination and are now in Oxford University Museum. They are found to be of mainly Hamitic and Semitic race, with an admixture of a third. It is already known that the sons of Japheth left the Euphrates valley at an early date but the Sumerians and Semites remained and intermingled as time went on.

The city was large; about five miles long by one mile wide, on the evidence of the remains. The houses were built along straight streets and had good sanitary drains and water supply. Their only metal was copper, of which they made carpenters' tools, saws and chisels, household utensils and mirrors. For transport they had horses and chariots. Some of the wooden wheels have survived and are among the oldest pieces of woodcraft ever discovered. They were agriculturists and shepherds but not warriors. In craftsmanship they were superb. Langdon has said that their skill in the fabrication of copper statuettes and ornaments was never equalled in later ages. The rituals that attended their burial reveal that they believed in a future life. That too must have come from Noah, an indication that mankind from the first, must have had some kind of revelation from God to the effect that death is not the end; the harm that had been done in Eden would one day be undone.

They had writing. Kish was founded at least three or four centuries before the invention of the cuneiform script in which most of the Babylonian and Sumerian tablets known to scholars are written. Prior to that time there was a pictographic script of which only a few examples have been found. This was apparently preceded by picture writing of which no examples have been found, probably written on some paper-like vegetable substance or wood material. The Sumerian word for writing tablets which in the historic period were of baked clay, has a determinative prefix which indicates a wood or plant material, not true clay. It looks as though the original name was carried over when the normal writing material changed. There is therefore this amount of evidence that the immediate descendants of Noah were familiar with writing and had convenient writing materials at their service. There is no reason to doubt that the early stories of Genesis existed in written form at a time little if any later than the Flood itself. It has often been remarked by students that the Bible story of the Flood bears all

the marks of an eye-witness account that has been written down for permanent record.

Something like three or four centuries after its founding, Kish suffered a major disaster. A colossal flood completely destroyed the city and its surroundings, and drowned most of its inhabitants. Langdon discovered the eighteen inch thick layer of clay marking this occurrence at the same time that C. L. Woolley found his eight foot similar layer at Ur and both discoveries were hailed at the time as evidence of Noah's Flood. Later and more sober investigation has shown that this was a mistake. These floods, caused by abnormal quantities of water carried down by the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, came much later in the historical sequence. As a rough estimate it is probable that this Kish flood occurred more or less during the lifetimes of the patriarchs Sala and Eber four or five generations after Noah. It was a long time before Kish recovered: probably several generations. Langdon writes "This flood definitely marked the end of an era. It covered uniformly and for a long time all that remained of the civilisation of Kish. This flood layer marks a complete separation between types which we have now left behind, the industries of the potter, founder, sculptor and the types of industries which will be found about it." The physical remains show this, the evidence of a highly sophisticated civilisation below the 'flood layer' is replaced by a considerably less cultured one above, and in some respects Kish never recovered its former grandeur. In a few more centuries its political power waned and by the time that Abraham was a young man at Ur it came to an end and was no more.

The principal value of the Kish discoveries is that its history comes just about midway between the Flood and Abraham and throws a little light upon the achievements of men at that time. Here, at least, in the very shadow of the great Tower which later ages looked upon as the symbol of man's defiance of God, there was a community which apparently still held to His worship. In later centuries though they accepted the 'gods many and lords many' which became the deities of all nations except Israel. It is a fascinating speculation that Eber, Abraham's ancestor, from whom the Hebrews took their name, may himself have been resident in this city in its earlier days. There is more than a possibility that the first few chapters

of Genesis in their present form were the work of Eber and in that case those chapters may well have appeared in the picture script of those days. At any rate there is some ground for thinking that, even at that time, God had not left Himself without

witness, preserving the seed of the faith until six hundred years later when Abraham came upon the scene to establish it on a sure foundation for ever.

The Exodus

4. Moses in Midian

*A series intended to
help younger readers
discover the Bible*

FLIGHT FROM EGYPT

According to Stephen in his speech before the Sanhedrin recorded in Acts 7.23 Moses *"was approaching forty when it occurred to him to visit his fellow-countrymen the Israelites"* (REB). The Exodus account just says that he was fully grown and history tells us that it was the time when the Egyptian princess who had adopted him, died. Thothmes III would have had no time for a possible rival and Moses began to find out the real distress of his own people Israel. Exodus pictures him going out to see for himself the burden upon the people is slavery and does not indicate that he had much previous knowledge of them.

When Moses intervened in a dispute between two Israelites, he received the angry retort *"Who set you up as an official and judge over us?"* Moses had killed an Egyptian overseer to protect an Israelite and now he felt it was common knowledge. Had one of his own people betrayed him? Pharaoh had heard of the matter and had set in motion the forces of law and order to arrest him. It is unknown whether he plotted to free Israel by violent means, but in any case, Moses did not stay to argue his case. He seemed to be rejected by Egyptians and Israelites. He therefore fled to Midian, a nomadic people of the Sinai desert who were descendants of Abraham and his third wife Keturah.

The Midianites were a proud and independent people who worshipped the same God as the patriarchs had done. Midianite merchants had taken Joseph to Egypt as a slave nearly two centuries before. The Egyptians did not rule them but found a useful labour force for their gold and copper mines from among these nomads. Moses would find them a friendly people, of similar religious culture and offering some safety from Egyptian vengeance. He was not a deliverer but a fugitive from Egypt yet in the Sinai desert he was preparing for his great work of leading Israel to Canaan. It is unlikely that Moses believed that this was the route he might take. The 'Way of the Philistines' would be much quicker and easier. While Moses was among the Midianites, Pharaoh Thothmes III led his army into Canaan and it took only nine days. As Moses

walked to Midian and into exile, he could not have realized how important the years ahead would be.

LIFE IN MIDIAN

In every respect life for Moses was a complete reversal of what he had enjoyed in his early years in Egypt. From a position of importance and authority he was now a refugee living among strangers. He had known wealth and comfort and now he was reduced to relative poverty and hardship. The luxurious city life in Egypt had changed to the utilitarian life in a Bedouin encampment. There were definite advantages, for gone were the temple and gods of Egypt and in their place was a piety akin to that of his forefathers. Like Abraham he could go out on a starry night, amid the realities of nature, and know that he stood in the presence of God. However, his view of God may have led him to believe that the deliverance of Israel would be more in the shape of a Divinely directed military operation. He might not yet know of the more vital factors in the worship of God. He may still have believed that he should rely on traditional military strength and if so would not be unlike his modern counterparts. His time of 'retreat' in Midian taught him something of the depths of God's purpose for Israel. He left Egypt as a statesman versed in the wisdom of this world. He returned from Midian forty years later, a prophet and servant of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, entrusted with the responsibility of organizing Israel into a theocracy to uphold the standards of righteousness before all peoples.

MOSES' MARRIAGE

Somewhere in the wilds of Sinai as he wandered away from Egypt, Moses sat down in an oasis, by a well to enjoy the shade of the trees. A little later, the daughters of a Midian chieftain came with their flocks and herds for evening watering. The momentous results of that meeting demonstrate the work of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of Moses which he was to experience again and again in his future work. There is a little difficulty with the father of the clan because he appears to be referred to as Reuel in Exodus 2 but later in the book is called Jethro. It is possible that Moses'

father-in-law had two names. It is also possible that one of these two was Moses' brother-in-law. It has been suggested that Jethro was a prince but most recent translations retain the AV 'priest' and that is how Jewish tradition viewed him. This might also be in keeping with the way in which the Midianite shepherds unceremoniously thrust aside the girls with the kind of contempt for women that was so common. The Midianites' uncivil behaviour was countered by Moses' gallantry and the girls went home to their father full of praise for the 'Egyptian' stranger. Father of the household quickly shared his daughters' excitement and very soon Moses was part of the household and installed as shepherd of the animals.

Perhaps it was inevitable that Moses should marry one of the daughters. There is no indication that he had married in Egypt. The marriage may not have occurred for several years and their family may have been somewhat delayed. Exodus 4 and 18 give the impression that Gershom was still only young when they finally linked up together as a family. From these two chapters also, we might infer that the second son, Eliezer was born while Moses was away from them in Egypt.

These are the only recorded children of Moses. Their descendants can be traced to the time of David when Jehdeiah represented the line of Gershom and Shelomith that of Eliezer (1 Chron. 24.20 and 26.26) Nothing of special interest is known of Moses' descendants, the man regarded as the greatest who had ever lived, and under God was the founder of their nation and the giver of their law. Some of them may have inherited his great gifts but the Spirit of the Living God is not inherited and comes to each generation as God gives it. They did not share the same enthusiasm for the work of God perhaps, and in any case the mantel of Moses fell upon a man who had already distinguished himself as a general in the field of battle and that is what Israel needed just then.

There is a puzzling reference to Moses having married a 'Cushite' in Numbers 12. Cushites lived in what we now call Ethiopia and were of different racial stock from the Hebrews, related to the Egyptians. There could have been a confusion of the names with the 'Kenites' of which people, Jethro was a member. There could also have been a kind of tribal jealousy between Zipporah and Moses family which is in keeping with the whole incident in Number 12.1. Elliott (Ellicott) suggests that Zipporah may have died and this was a subsequent marriage; the Law only forbade marriage to Canaanites.

The family of Jethro lingered long in Israel. They appear from time to time in OT history. Jael, heroine in the defeat of Sisera was, like her husband Heber, a Kenite (Judges 4.11; 5.24). When King Saul campaigned in Sinai against the Amalekites he spared the Kenites still living there on account of their historic connection with Israel (1 Samuel 15.6). Later still Rechab became the first temperance advocate (2 Kings 10.15; Jer. 35) and his name survives today in a friendly society of that persuasion. Jehonadab his son helped Jehu in the idolatry purges in the northern tribes. The last recorded branch of the house of Jethro, from Hobab, is Jaazaniah in the time of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 35.3) eight hundred years after the Exodus. The nomadic skills of the Kenites had not disappeared after nearly a millennium of settled agricultural life. While Israel around them built and occupied houses, extending to towns and cities, the Kenites continued to cling to the way of life of the ancestors in Sinai in the days of Moses.

Meanwhile the Israelites lived in poverty-stricken slavery under the dominion of Thothmes III. He so hated his step-mother who also became his wife, Hatshetsup, that he erased her name from many monuments. So this 'princess' who played such a vital part in the history of God's people was unknown to history until recent times.

"Years passed, during which time the king of Egypt died, but the Israelites groaned in slavery. They cried out, and their plea for rescue from slavery ascended to God. He heard their groaning and called to mind his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he observed the plight of Israel and took heed of it" (Exodus 2.23-25 REB). The new king was Amen-hetep II Pharaoh of the Exodus, a ruthless despot, cruel and merciless in battle, causing unnecessary bloodshed in time of war. The cry of God's people reached Him and something of a religious revival must have been taking place in Israel. Memories of the Patriarchs must have been revived and promises of faraway Canaan talked about. Perhaps there was anticipation of a deliverer, expectation and hope at last. Some in Israel may have kept in touch with Moses while he was in exile. The present head of the tribe of Levi, brother of the exiled Moses went out to confer with him. Moses might even have been urged to return and assume leadership. If so, He would not move till he had God's direction and so he waited for the sign and the commission. *"So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them."* (NIV v.25). Moses would not have long to wait.

(To be continued.)



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Thought for the Month

A husband and wife went to worship at their usual Christian Fellowship. It was Sunday morning and their children went with them. The husband went straight to his usual place, sat down and bowed his head in reverential prayer. He quietly listed the week's activity in which he had been to the Bible study and the Prayer fellowship as well as the Elders' meeting. He had made several useful contacts for the witness of the Fellowship. He had ardently studied the Scriptures in preparation for meetings. He had sent off a cheque for the overseas relief work. He felt the Lord should be pleased with his efforts.

Meanwhile, his wife had taken the children into Sunday School and settled them down. She had also prepared all the refreshments to follow the hour of worship. At the last moment she came hurriedly to sit beside her now impatient husband.

Briefly she bowed her head and said to the Lord how sorry she was that she was so late, and then "But Lord, you know me". And a loving Father looked down from His dwelling place and assured her "Yes dear, I know you well and ... I wish it could be so with everyone in your congregation this morning".

Jesus told a parable once about a Pharisee and a tax collector. I wonder what the Pharisee would have said if he could have known God's thoughts about that parable. Jesus also spoke of those who did many wonderful works in His name. Yet he uttered the most terrible warning concerning them "I never knew you". As one beloved brother said just before the end of his earthly journey "It isn't so much what we know, or even what we do, that matters but rather what we are."

These Changing Times - Cover Story

In its early years the Monthly cover was quite simple, just a heading followed by an article or notices. It was in July 1936 that the flame of a candle shining on a book, a Bible, brightened the magazine heading. It was not until January 1939 that it reached its present size with a formal cover. The magazine title was now surrounded by little blocks of type representing writings of ancient times with different languages and translations. These two ideas may be welded into a new cover

design, as from January 2001, if the Lord so wills. They will replace 'Ezekiel's Temple' which first appeared in January 1948. It is felt that it is time for a change. We hope the change will not cause too much distress. Some of our oldest readers may find the 'new' cover nostalgic - bringing back memories of former years. It is certainly our hope that it will be a cover which will represent the contents of the magazine.

Gone from us

Sister Paula Wiggins (*Sunnymede, Staines*)
Brother Tom Wilson (*Heselden, Hartlepool*)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

*A Bible Study of Paul's letter
to the Galatians*

1. Background to the letter

Paul's letter to the Churches in Galatia was written out of a full heart. The Apostle was deeply distressed by the deterioration of their faith in Christ since he had last seen them. So who were the 'Galatian believers' that Paul should be so concerned. Galatia was part of the country that we now call Turkey. It was in the central highlands and part of a region known in Bible times as Asia and later called Asia Minor. Several centuries before Christ, Celts from Gaul migrated eastward into the northern part of this territory and for a long time in church history, it was believed that Paul's letter was addressed to churches among them. This could have been the area through which Paul and his companions passed on their way to Troas and Europe. Acts 16.6 distinctly records that they were guided by the Holy Spirit not to proclaim the Gospel there. During the past hundred and fifty years, scholars have gradually realised that Paul's letter was sent to the churches in southern Galatia where he had preached the Gospel so effectively during his first journey with Barnabas through Antioch (Pisidia), Iconium, Derbe and Lystra. If this is so, it fits very well with the descriptions about the Jewish hindrance to the Gospel during those travels and the need for a council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15.

Paul had preached the simple Gospel of Christ to those communities of believers in Galatia. It was the same Gospel that had been preached since Pentecost concerning the coming of Messiah and fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Jesus of Nazareth. In His life and death, His resurrection and ascension to the glory of the Father, Jesus had shown by teaching and miracles that there was now good news for all mankind. The Apostolic preaching clearly showed that salvation from sin was to be found freely in Christ for all peoples. Paul demonstrated that this Gospel was spoken of by prophets such as Isaiah, who had said that Israel was a light to the nations so that God's salvation should reach to "earth's farthest bounds" (Isa. 49.6). Yet this was not new to those who believed the promise to Abraham that "*in you all families of the earth shall be blessed*" (Genesis 12.3). The part which the Gentiles were already playing in God's purpose was shown by Jesus Himself in the

synagogue service in Nazareth (Luke 4.24-27). In his remarkable address to the Sanhedrin, Stephen had clearly laid down the principles by which God worked outside the Promised Land and outside normal Jewish traditions. That speech was a 'water shed' in separating the Christian Church from Jewish religion. Paul heard those words and when he took up the cause of Christ, it was within the same framework of a gospel to all mankind. The days of the Law Covenant had been numbered from the time of Jesus, and now it was clear to all true believers that there was no other name given among men whereby they could be saved except in Jesus Christ. It was Peter who had made that claim before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4.12), and it was that same Apostle who had declared to Cornelius that "God has no favourites". When he served the church at Antioch, Peter enjoyed table fellowship with non-Jews. Later, however, he withdrew from their company and allowed religious scruples, learned in childhood to motivate his behaviour (Galatians 2.11-14). It was a hard lesson to learn.

It has often been said that James' general letter, opposed Paul's Gospel of grace. Firstly, it should be noted that James, as leader of the Jerusalem church, was the first to make a public declaration for the benefit of the churches further afield, concerning the keeping of the Law. He was among the first to recognise those Jewish teachers who were troubling the Gentile churches who insisted that all should keep the Law (Acts 15 particularly vv 19 and 24). James' contention in his letter was not that 'law keeping' should replace the free grace of the gospel, but that faith exhibited in Jesus Christ must be demonstrated in action. This is precisely Paul's point in his letter to the Galatians in chapters 5 and 6. In fact it is a pattern adopted by Paul in other letters, notably Romans, where he carefully explains Christian doctrine and then shows how it works out in practical Christian living.

When Moses had given the Law to Israel at Sinai he had shown a nation of slaves how to behave towards God and toward their fellow men. He had laid down, for the first time, the principles of moral behaviour and from those great teachings, Israel was to become "a light to the Gentiles".

Instead of growing up in spiritual life, they used their wonderful code as if it were a religion of the nations, often mixing it up with pagan worship and customs. Patiently God showed them through the prophets that their Covenant with Him contained ethical principles that needed to be applied to changing circumstances and their development as a nation. Their failure to live by God's law ended in exile in Babylon. On their return to the Land of the Promise the Jews were determined that they would never again be exiled and so they built up a system of teaching that was intended to help them reach their goal of 'keeping the law'. It was a system of religion that prevented them from discovering their Messiah. He turned that system upside down and showed them how empty it was. They were wrapped up in a structure of rules and regulations, which became to them the way of piety and holiness. Certain aspects of this structure, like circumcision, Sabbath keeping and avoiding certain foods, were more important to them than justice and mercy. But those rules and laws did not make them holy before God nor give them access into His presence. To them, His special people, befell the most tragic indictment, **God did not know them.**

It was by their system of law keeping that Jewish teachers deceived new converts in Galatia. These converts were not just from the Jewish synagogue. Some had been Gentiles converted from pagan religions. Paul finds it unbelievable that any should want to turn to that kind of religious belief again, whether they were from Jewish or Gentile backgrounds. How could they be so foolish he says? In past times the Gentiles had been entangled with worthless idols and immoral practices which only made slaves of them to sin. Their lives had been tangled with wrong use of food, wrong use of God-given power of procreation, wrong attitudes to other people which resulted in violence, killing, deception, greed and lots of unhappy, unwanted children. Similarly, the way most Jews practised the Jewish law in the first century, was a method of slavery. They spent all their time and energy trying to keep thousands of rules and so missed the whole point of real piety. It was all an outward show of superficial religion, that was supposed to impress other people. It didn't impress God. It had nothing of the power of the Holy Spirit of God that changes lives and

transforms sinners into His image. Superficial religion is dead, lifeless and useless. And this was what the foolish Galatians had turned to serve.

The underlying issue was that religion of human origin taught that men and women could climb up to heaven by what they did for themselves. For the pagan it was meaningless cultic activities, often quite immoral. For the Jew it was 'works of the Law' which meant doing things in a way prescribed by the Jewish system. Both types of religion believed that the only way to get salvation was by earning it. They thought they earned it by going through ceremony and ritual, and even the ordinary things of life became 'ritualised'. It was to this, that the enemies of God, Jewish leaders and pagan philosophers and priests had led those naive Galatians. Why, why, why cries Paul when you have been liberated from such foolishness? Yet it has ever been so. During the Christian era many have been seduced into forms of religion, ritual and outward appearance, including special forms of dress, none of which have anything to do with the life and work of Jesus Christ. Buildings became more important than the worship that went on inside those shrines. Wealth was used in building and ritual that would have been better distributed to the poor. Even archaic forms of words were regarded as more essential than the outpouring of the humble believer's heart. Nor was outward reform enough to completely sweep away the problems of superficial religion. Stone idols were swept away only to be replaced by idolising the great reformers and it still continues. Sacerdotal formularies have gone but in their place sacred interpretations of doctrine bind their adherents, so that the freedom won on Calvary is made void. The Gospel which Paul preached and which the early Church proclaimed is centred on the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is the proclaiming of the cross which changed the lives of men and women in the first century and it is the only way by which lives can be changed in the twenty-first.

Before embarking on the main argument of Paul's letter to the Galatians, there remains one point to clarify which took quite a space in the early part of the letter. It concerned his authority as an apostle. The Jewish teachers he refers to were believers in the early church and not sent from the Jewish priesthood. In order to establish their

arguments about the importance of keeping the Law, they had tried to undermine Paul's standing among those whom he had converted to faith in Christ. Before going to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles, Saul of Tarsus, then recently converted to the faith in Christ, had received a direct revelation from Jesus concerning what he must preach in the years to come. He spent some time in Damascus, the city where he received the faith and where he was baptised. He also lived in the wastes of Arabia (Gal. 1.17) that may or may not have necessitated a long journey. There were interesting Nabataean trade routes south and east from Damascus. What Saul needed most was a quiet retreat to listen to the Lord and ponder what He wanted him to do and preach in the years to come. This prepared him not only for what he would give in teaching but also for what he would receive in suffering with his Lord. During those years Paul became familiar with the Master, who he had never seen in His earthly ministry unlike the other apostles. It also may have been here that Paul received the revelations of which he speaks in 2 Cor. 12.2 when he heard things to which he could

not then give expression. Ready for his life long work of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles Paul returned to Damascus. His powerful preaching eventually led to the need to escape from Damascus and he went to Jerusalem. He met with Peter and with James. There is no record of any discord, but the churches of Judaea had peace when at last he went home to Tarsus. Paul was now at the spearhead of the Gospel's onslaught upon human religion. Jews within and outside the Church recognised that this must always be a serious threat to their idea of piety. Jewish believers did all they could to disclaim his credentials as an apostle and Paul shows in the first part of his letter to the Galatians that his mission had been given not by High Priests or other Apostles, but directly from the Lord. In doing so he could not avoid relating how Peter, and even Barnabas had lowered their standards in not wanting to sit at table with all their Christian brethren. It is a salutary lesson for us. Withholding fellowship from Christ's brethren is a serious matter, especially to our own growth in grace.

DN

Those Authors' Names

The initials of authors of articles was used first in the BSM in 1941. This practice ceased at the end of 1945 but was restored in 1952 for a short time. Then in January 1956 the full names of authors appeared in the Monthly for nearly a year. It was not till 1996 that names again appeared, with the full approval of the previous editor. Indeed his only reason for not using them through the years had been the shortage of suitable contributors and the frequency that his own name appeared. The authors' names were discontinued at the beginning of this year because some felt it was not best practice. A number of articles that appear each issue are reprints from the Monthly of twenty and more years ago. Since we were not certain who the authors of some of these articles were, it was felt that perhaps after all the practice should be discontinued. Immediately more communications reached the editor objecting to name discontinuance than had ever been sent objecting to their use. The will of the Lord is sought concerning every detail of BFU publications for in all things we want to please Him. In future, where they are known, initials of authors or source of material will be placed at the end of articles. We

will gladly forward full names to any reader who so requests.

Gift Aid

Due to new regulations operating from April 2000 it is now possible to recover money paid in income tax from any gift sent to Bible Fellowship Union. If you pay income tax all you will need to do is sign the form which will be sent at 'renewal time' and return it to us with your gift. This will enable BFU to recover tax paid from Inland Revenue. Until then, anyone who wishes to send a gift should do so with a covering letter stating that you are giving the money to Bible Fellowship Union and then sign it. The 'covenant' system has been abolished. Any amount may be given now, occasionally or regularly. Of course this applies only to readers who actually pay UK income tax. But if you do BFU can recover 28p for every £1 received. This is a very much simpler arrangement than previously.

Recordings of each issue of the Bible Study Monthly are now made. These are principally made for blind friends. If you are interested we welcome your enquiries.

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

Amos 9.1-15

10. Dispersed among the Nations

The tremendous finale to the prophecy of Amos is presented in chapter nine. The whole of all that he has to say in the preceding chapters leads up to this. Here he receives a revelation of the Divine majesty such as he has not experienced before. At the beginning, in the first two chapters, it is "Thus saith the Lord", a plain declaration of judgment soon to come. Following that, in chapters three to six, there is a note of urgency punctuating his messages, "Hear this word". Next, in chapters seven and eight, his vision clarifies and he says, "Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me". Now, in his final vision and last word to his countrymen, he beholds the person of God Himself, "I saw the Lord stand beside the altar". It was not given to many men to see God. Moses did, in vision. Amos is one of four men of whom it is said that they saw God, and his message is the more significant on that account.

"I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said, Smite the capitals of the door that the thresholds may shake, and break their heads, all of them, and I will slay the remainder with the sword. He that fleeth will not get far, and he that escapeth will not get free." (9.1).

This is the Lord come down to judge in person, taking His stand beside the great altar of burnt offering - the "Brasen Altar" - in the precincts of the Temple opposite the main doorway into the Sanctuary, the "Holy". In the ordinary way the priests came to that altar with their offerings, and the consuming by fire of those offerings was construed as an indication of Divine acceptance - God remained in heaven and accepted the devotion and loyalty of His people. Now, there was no devotion and no loyalty and God would no longer brook His people's unfaithfulness. He had come down from heaven to take His stand by the desecrated altar and pronounce sentence.

Without much doubt Amos was standing in the Temple court when he saw this vision. Behind the altar he would look upon the two gigantic pillars, surmounted by spreading stone capitals, sixty feet high, which Solomon had set on each side of the doorway when he built this magnificent Temple. Between those pillars and into that Sanctuary only the priests might go, and into the inner shrine only

the High Priest, to meet with God. Now God had come out to meet with all Israel. As Amos looked upon the teeming crowds which were always to be found in the outer court, and then at the awe-inspiring Figure whom only he could see, he knew that he was again to be the agent of the Divine message. He waited in silence to receive his commission.

"Smite the capitals of the door that the thresholds may shake". Amos looked up at those ornate stone carvings sixty feet above his head and shuddered. If those capitals came crashing down in pieces the people below would be crushed to death. That is what the Lord meant. Their heads would be broken and those who perchance escaped would be overtaken by Divine judgment before they had got very far. This vision was a prophecy picturing the destruction of the Temple and the consequent end of Israel's relationship with God and their own destruction as a nation. The following verses make clear that here was being foreshadowed in symbol the final overturning of the Jewish polity at the time of Christ's First Advent and the dispersion of the nation among all the peoples of the earth. After all the local captivities and overthrows which Amos had already predicted had come upon them in the more or less imminent future. This was to be the final and greatest one. Speaking of the same event, Jesus said *"they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"* (Luke 21.24).

All this came upon Israel forty years after the Crucifixion, when Titus besieged and captured Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and the city, and expelled the entire population from the country to wander as outcasts and fugitives throughout the earth. It is often said in some Christian circles that the harrowing experiences of the Jewish people through the past two thousand years is in consequence of their rejection of God and position as His covenant people. God had done everything for them and given them everything, and they threw it back in His face. That which came upon them was the penalty laid down in the original

covenant made with them at Sinai (Lev. 26.27-33). So the Lord says, *"though they dig into the underworld, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in (the caves on) the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence I will command the serpent, and he shall bite them"* (vv2-3). No place will exist in all the earth where they may escape the searching hand of God and the impact of His judgments. Much in this reminds one of the words of the Psalmist, *"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in the underworld, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee"* (Psalm 139.7-12). There is no possible escape from God. *"And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword and it shall slay them, and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil and not for good"* (Amos 9.4). How literally that declaration has been fulfilled! Israel has been under the sword these two thousand years. It is as though God has rejected and forsaken His ancient people and will have no more to do with them. In the words of Jeremiah, spoken then of the earlier but similar exile *"Judah went into the misery of exile and endless servitude. Settled among the nations she found no resting-place. All her persecutors fell upon her in her sore straits"* (Lam. 1.3 NEB). And the despairing ending of that prophet's lamentation is equally fitted to the position of the exiled people in the later day: *"thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us"* (Lam. 5.22).

But there comes a turning point. This is where the Lord ceases from His denunciation of His people's shortcomings and speaks of their ultimate reconciliation to Him and restoration as a sovereign nation in their own land with a promise that never again will they be uprooted. This is where the prophecy of Amos passes into the Millennial Age and he talks of the Lord's intention

to use a converted and faithful Israel as agents in His great work of world evangelisation. All the lessons will have been learned; the people will no more go after false gods and the Ages of sin and death will have ended. Christ will reign as king over a redeemed and restored human society in which there will be every incentive to righteous living and every prospect of eventual reconciliation to God and entry into everlasting life for 'whosoever will' (Rev. 22.17; Isa. 55.1).

First of all, and as guarantee of both His will and His power to do these things; God presents, as it were, His credentials. Israel for a long time has worshipped and trusted false gods who consistently proved to be no gods, unable to protect or help those who trusted in them. Now God reminds Israel of His own power and omnipotence, preparatory to telling them exactly what He is going to do. The NEB expresses it best, *"The Lord, the God of Hosts, at whose touch the earth heaves and all who dwell on it wither. It surges like the Nile, and subsides like the river of Egypt. He builds his terraces up to the heavens and arches his vault over the earth; He summons the waters of the sea, and pours them over the land. The Lord is his name"* (v.6).

Israel knew full well His power in metaphorical earthquake and flood. Invading armies had disrupted their land and destroyed their cities more effectively than any literal earthquake. At His decree the overrunning flood of enemy hosts had carried them all away into captivity as by a universal flood of waters, just like the Nile at the time of its annual inundation. Too late, they realised the truth of the warnings they had received and now that the judgments had been executed they knew that this was the hand of the Lord and an evidence of the power He possessed over against the impotence of their false gods. This was evidence they could no longer deny. Then He reminds them that He is indeed God Most High - the name by which their ancestor Abraham knew Him, the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth (Gen.14.22). Conforming to the primitive thought of that day, He tells them that He dwells at the summit of the terraces He has built from earth to heaven, under the arching sky which rests on the extremities of the earth and forms a huge vault over the dwelling places of men. The ancients built lofty staged towers to mimic the legendary

mountains which they said were at the centre of the world and whose peak supported the heavens and there, they said, the gods dwelt, overseeing the affairs of mortal men. I am that God, said the Lord to Israel, and I have all power and what I say, I will do. To the more thoughtful of his hearers, those who are likely to form the ideal Israel that shall inherit the promises about to be made, there is made known a most important principle of the Divine purpose. Israel in the days of Sinai accepted the God-given commission of being a priestly nation which eventually should fulfil the promise to Abraham of ministering to and conveying a blessing to all the families of the earth. In those later days, that understanding had degenerated into an exclusiveness which maintained that Israel alone, as the chosen of God, was to receive the blessings of the future; the remaining nations of the world were to be excluded from anything that God had to give. Now the time had come to make plain that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10.34), that in His pure sight all people of all nations are to have the opportunity of blessings unto eternal life when the time of Christ's reign has come. *"Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?"* demanded the Lord. *"Have not I brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?"* (v.7). In the days of Amos the Ethiopians or Cushites, dark-skinned nation of Eastern Africa, were about the most remote and least-known people to the Israelites. So far as God was concerned, however, they meant just as much to Him as did Israel and were just as much in His purposes. He recognised no fundamental difference. Admittedly He had delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage and brought them across the wilderness to a new land, Canaan, but so had He done with the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete). It is known that the Philistines were colonists from the island of Crete but there is no intimation anywhere else that the Lord had anything to do with their emigration from their native land. Likewise, He says, He brought the Syrians from Kir. The Syrians are believed to be the descendants of Aram, son of Shem, from whom the ancient name of all northern Mesopotamia is derived and the Syrians (Greek name) were actually called in their own tongue Arameans. All that is really known of Kir is that it was in Amos' time a

province of the Assyrian empire and that the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser transported the Syrians there when he conquered their country and took them into captivity (2 Kings 16.9; Amos 1.5). At a somewhat later date the forces of Kir were allied with those of Elam at the time of the fall of Babylon (Isaiah 22.6) from which it has been concluded that Kir was situated in what is called Kurdistan. This may well have been the home of the descendants of Aram in the days after the Flood but here again this text is the only intimation that the Lord had anything to do with the migration of the Arameans into what is still, today, Syria. Perhaps it is more likely though that these are but a few examples of the process alluded to by Moses in Deut. 32.8. *"When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel."* Paul also comments in Acts 17.26 *"hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation"*. If these two texts mean anything at all, it must be that the Lord has had a greater hand in the settlement of different nations in specific areas than has generally been supposed. In the present context at any rate it certainly was an intimation to Israel that they were not the only nation in which the Lord was interested. There were others, Gentile nations, usually considered outsiders, whom also the Lord purposed to bless and the coming day of restoration and blessing was not for Israel only but for the whole world of man.

Now the Lord is turning more definitely to the faithful 'remnant' in Israel who have not *"bowed the knee to Baal"* nor forsworn their allegiance to the Lord. These are the ones to whom He addresses His promises for the future; these are ones to whom He confides His future intentions. *"Behold the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord"* (v.8). The significant clause is the last one. That the kingdom was to be destroyed was already known; the many declarations of judgment by Amos had ensured that. God now declares that a remnant is to be preserved, a seed from which a new Israel may one day spring. Isaiah had this same assurance in his

vision of the same thing (Isa. 6.11-13). A great captivity and a great forsaking in the midst of the land but the Lord's tithe would be preserved like the sap in a cut-down tree, ready to burst forth into new life when the season is right. So the Lord goes on to explain *"I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth"* (v.9). Here is a familiar picture, the separation of wheat from chaff. The chaff falls through the sieve and is discarded. Every good grain is retained and put to its intended use. So the scattering of Israel among the nations of earth during this long two thousand years from the First Advent until now has served and is serving the purpose of manifesting those whose hearts are right with God. They will become members of that Holy Nation which in the End Time will stand forth as the champion for God and righteousness in a world which has little time for either, a nation which will receive Christ as King. This will become the spearhead of that onslaught on the power of world evil that will result in the full establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

One word of warning and one that comes strangely at this particular point of the prophecy, *"All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor come near us"* (v.10). If the house of Israel has been sifted and only the elect remain in the days of which the prophet is now speaking, and the time of the kingdom has come, who are these "sinners" who now must die by the sword?

It would seem that we are taken to the critical time at the end of this Age when the faithful "remnant" now constitute a Holy nation and in full

possession of the Holy Land, await that onslaught of the powers of evil which is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. This is to be terminated abruptly by Divine intervention from above, the deliverance of faithful Israel and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth. There is Scriptural ground for concluding that at this crucial time the faith of some will fail and they will separate themselves from the full-of-faith but apparently doomed nation which is relying entirely upon God for deliverance. Zechariah says of this same time and event that the city (Jerusalem) shall be encompassed as in a net, that is, besieged and one portion shall go forth into captivity but the remainder shall be preserved (Zech. 14.1-2). Since this is the time of deliverance for faithful Israel and of the final defeat of all her enemies it is obvious that these who have lost or never had real faith; at the time of trial they defect to what they think will be a place of greater safety. In practice they go back to the outer world of evil forces and are lost. This is the meaning of the verse in Amos. Those who still, even in that day, are classed as unbelievers and think that by allying themselves with the forces of this world rather than the people of God, they will escape, will be separated from the Holy nation just so effectively as if slain by the sword. By trusting themselves to the mercies of men rather than those of God the sword may well be literal as well as metaphorical. From the Divine point of view, though, they are excluded from participation in the great drama now about to begin, the actual transfer of world dominion to our Lord Jesus Christ.

AOH

Gamaliel's Prediction

"I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them - You might even be found opposing God!" (Acts 5.38, 39) The prediction of Gamaliel has been fulfilled. Men have opposed Christianity in every way, but in vain. They have reviled it; have persecuted it; have resorted to argument and to ridicule, to fire and fagot and sword; they have called in the aid of science; but

all has been in vain. The more it has been crushed, the more it has risen, and still exists with as much life and power as ever. The preservation of this religion amidst so much and so varied opposition, proves that it is of God. No severer trial can await it than it has already experienced; and as it has survived so many storms and trials, we have every evidence that according to the predictions, it is destined to live, and to fill the world. (Matt. 16. 18; Isa. 54.17; Isa. 55.11; Dan. 4.35)

THE GROWTH OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

*An exhortation from
2 Peter 1.5,7,10*

There is a philosophy in the growth and development of Christian character, as truly as in the growth and development of vegetation. The more thoroughly we acquaint ourselves with the natural processes, the better we shall understand how to cultivate and to secure the spiritual end – maturity and luxuriant fruitfulness. The farmer who puts into practice only what he has learned by accident, in a haphazard way, and is goaded to effort only by sheer necessity, must not expect the fruitful fields and abundant harvests of the enterprising farmer. He will have made a study of the techniques and brought together carefully gleaned knowledge with enterprise and energy to assist his work.

Here is a fruit tree. If one knows nothing about cultivation and simply plants the tree and lets it alone, its strength, instead of producing fruit, will go towards making wood and leaves. Little animals and decay may attack its roots, while insects may blight its scanty fruitage. If it continues to stand, it will only be a useless, fruitless waste of the ground, an advertisement of the farmer's negligence and worthy only of having the axe laid to its root. Had it been pruned and trimmed and kept free from insects, under the blessing of God's air and rain and sunshine, it would have been a fruitful, creditable tree, for the laws of Nature are true and faithful in all their operations.

None the less rigid, are the operations of moral law in the growth and development of moral character. Under proper conditions and with proper diligent cultivation the character will grow and develop according to fixed laws, and will become beautiful and fruitful in blessings to self and others. Lacking the necessary cultivation, even under favourable natural conditions, it will be deformed, worthless and fruitless.

When we presented ourselves to God, acceptable through the merit of our Redeemer, we received the 'spirit of adoption' as sons of God. From that time the facilities and dispositions of our mortal bodies are changed by new life under the control of the Spirit of God. The faithfulness with which we cultivate our new nature, by weeding out

old habits of thought and action, supplanting them with new virtues, trained to activity in God's service, will prove our worthiness or unworthiness at the resurrection.

The Apostle affirms (Rom. 8.11) that if we have the Spirit of God in us, it will quicken our mortal bodies, make them alive towards God, active in growing into His likeness and fruitful in Christian graces and activities. He adds, "*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his ... As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*" (Rom. 8.9,14). It is our task, therefore, to grow, to cultivate in ourselves those characteristics which are worthy of God's sons, called to be "*heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ*".

The Apostle Peter tells us how to proceed in the matter of cultivating Christian character, intimating that we cannot do it all in a day nor in a few days. It will be a gradual daily life-work, a process of addition – adding virtue to virtue, grace to grace, day by day and hour by hour. He writes, "*make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these things are yours and abound they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (2 Peter 1.5-8). This is a strong assurance, that if we do these things we are sure to stand approved of God.

Now for a little self-examination. Let each ask him or herself:

1. Have I the faith to which Peter here refers; not faith in everything and everyone but faith in God - in His plan of redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, and in all His rich promises built upon that sure foundation? Do I trust Him implicitly? Is a "*Thus saith the Lord*" the end of all controversy, the solution of all doubts and the restful assurance to every perplexity?

2. Am I endeavouring to lead an upright life? This, to the child of God, implies much more than merely abstaining from evil. It implies living

truthfully. It is fortitude, strength of character in righteousness. It implies the cultivation of integrity in our dealings with God and fellowmen, scrupulous in honesty, justice and truth. The Psalmist clearly defines it by saying "*He walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks the truth from his heart; who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, does not take up a reproach against his neighbour; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honours those who fear the Lord; who swears to his own hurt and does not change (who will not violate a contract found to be unfavourable to himself); who does not put his money at interest (taking unjust advantage of the necessity of others) and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall not be moved.*" (Psalm 15.2-5). Such is the person who may approach God. How much we need to ask for God's help! How critically we should look at ourselves!

3. Am I endeavouring day by day to gain a more thorough and complete knowledge of God, of His purpose, revealed in His Word and of its special features as they apply to me; of His will concerning me in the particular relationships and conditions of today, irrespective of my own feelings in any matter? Neglect of this Divinely appointed means of knowledge is equivalent to setting up my own imperfect standard.

4. Am I temperate, moderate, exercising self-control in all things - in eating, in drinking, in home arrangements, in conduct, in thoughts, in words and actions? Do I realise that self-control is one of the most important elements in character? "*He that rules his spirit is better than he that takes a city*"; and many a victorious general has yet to learn to conquer and control himself. Self control has to do with our thoughts, tastes, appetites, labours, pleasures, sorrows and hopes. Its cultivation, means a high order of character development. Self-control, accompanied by faith, fortitude, knowledge from on high, implies increased zeal and activity in Divine things, and increased moderation in earthly things. Let all see by our thoughtful and sensitive manner that in every way we honour our commitment to God.

5. Am I patient under trial and discipline, keeping my feelings under the control of enlightened reason, letting patience have its perfect work in cultivating the character, however

severely the plough and the harrow may break up the sub-soil of my heart, submitting to the Lord's discipline in all things. Am I submitting cheerfully under the mighty hand of God, in His work of preparing me for a place in His Kingdom soon to be established?

6. Am I carefully observing and endeavouring to follow the pattern in character and action of God's model in Jesus? If as a parent or in any place of authority am I using that authority as God uses His. Do I use it for selfish purposes, to make a boast of it, or in any way to oppress or trample upon the God-given rights of those under such authority or for their blessing and advantage even to self-denial with patience, dignity and grace?

If a son or one under authority, do I consider the example of loving obedience given by our Lord? His delight was to do the Father's will at any cost to himself. As a man, under the kingdoms and authorities of this world, and as a youth under the authority of parents, He was loyal and faithful (Matt. 22.21; Luke 2.51). All of this earthly authority was exercised by His personal inferiors even though they were His legal superiors. How beautifully we shall be able to grace whatever station we occupy in life, if we carefully study and copy godliness whether as princes or peasants, masters or servants!

7. Does brotherly-kindness characterize all my actions? Does it cause me to make due allowances for the inherited weaknesses or the circumstances or misfortunes of others? Does brotherly love deal patiently and helpfully and wisely at the expense of self-interest? As I look myself squarely in the face and recognize weakness of character, do I thankfully accept the offer of a brother's or sister's aid or reproof? Do I determine that by God's grace I will overcome such attitudes and prove myself a help rather than a hindrance to others?

8. Have I absolutely sincere love for the unrighteous and unlovely as well as for the good and beautiful? This is a love which is always ready to show itself in wise and helpful activity for saint and sinner, a love which has compassion, help, comfort, cheerfulness and blessing to all within its reach? It longs for the grand opportunities in power and glory of the Age to come and for its privilege of scattering blessings to all. To that end it uses every opportunity now, wisely and in harmony with God's plan. This is the behaviour of

those who will share with the Lord in His Kingdom. Unless that character is developing now, we shall not be ready for that service with Him.

Just as in a well-kept orchard, pruning, trimming and cultivation are necessary to accomplish the desired end of fruitfulness, so must we be watchful and take necessary precautions to prevent blight and decay of character. We must ever guard against the intrusion of evil powers and influences that may sap the spiritual life. By resisting the Devil he will flee from us; by patient continuance in well-doing an increasing measure

of development will result. *"If these things be yours and abound"* says Peter, *"they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these things is blind and short-sighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."* (2 Peter 1. 8-11)

BJD

THE EXODUS

*A series intended to
help younger readers
discover the Bible*

5 -The Burning Bush

Exodus chapter 3 brings to an end Moses' life in Midian. At eighty years old he is still virile and active supervising the stock farm of his father-in-law Jethro. The latter probably thought that Moses was permanently settled in Midian. The references to Aaron in chapter 4 may indicate that Moses had kept in touch with his family during the previous forty years. There is more detail from now on in the story and geographical references show that the writer was familiar with the Sinai peninsula. Moses led his flock 'behind' the desert to the mountain of Horeb. Modern translations use 'west side' of the desert, which accurately translates the Hebrew idiom but Sinai was to the east of Midian. More importantly, Moses was near the place where God would later meet with Israel. He had passed through the desert, often translated wilderness and which was grass and bush covered land where normally nomadic tribes pastured their animals.

So as Moses quietly attended his sheep, he noticed the remarkable bush that burned but was not destroyed. The Hebrew indicates that this was an acacia bush and there are reliable witnesses to such events. Sinai was covered with such bushes and in the wind and sunlight they appeared to be shimmering golden flame. Trees with oil-bearing fruit are known to spring into spontaneous combustion. The Biblical account is miraculous in that God reveals himself from the fire as He did on other occasions. This is part of the Divine intervention that redeems Israel from Egypt and

places the nation in the land as promised to Abraham.

Moses did not want to go to Egypt or to lead Israel out. The fire of enthusiasm from earlier years burned low. His desire for Israel's deliverance would be as strong as ever but that was for a young man. He now shrank from what had once seemed an attractive role as leader of Israel *"Moses said to God 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel, out of Egypt?'"*, Moses had to learn that Israel's deliverance from Egypt was solely the work of God and that he was only an instrument of God's power. The opening of the message had been *"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... I have witnessed the misery of my people in Egypt and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know what they are suffering and have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians ... Come, I will send you to Pharaoh"* (Exodus 3.6-11). Since God would be with him why did he doubt? The first hurdle to surmount was Moses' consciousness of weakness and lack of confidence. But this was really an advantage, for in weakness he would discover God's strength, Moses' first objection had been overruled.

So Moses tried another excuse. If he was to go to Egypt not in his own strength as leader, in whose name should he go? This demonstrates Israel's conception of God. A national tradition that they were the children of Abraham, who had been

called out of Ur, had been preserved. That was a long time ago and they had been influenced by the religion of Egypt and its gods. How would they know Him and how could they picture Him? What guarantee had the people of Israel that trust in this strange god of the desert would prove greater than the gods of Egypt? The Divine reply to Moses is one of the most sublime passages in the whole Bible. "*God answered, 'I AM that I am, Tell them that I AM has sent you to them'*". In those words God asserts His own eternity. The word used is *hayah* which may be substituted for the 'third person' Yahweh. It should never have been translated Jehovah which was manufactured by early scholars from Yahweh and donay (Lord). The translation of the word into modern English usually follows the tradition of the AV and gives it as LORD. Moffatt renders the word 'Eternal' and is the only possible way of describing the One who is from everlasting to everlasting, without beginning and without end, who is and was and shall be. He must be differentiated from all the false gods of the nations, all of whom have names and characteristics none of whom are eternal. The Almighty cannot have a name in the same sense as those man-made gods. This is the only God who has responsibility in making and sustaining all things. In what clearer terms could there be conveyed to mortal man the realisation that in all his endeavours to know or visualise or define God, the Creator, the simple expression 'Eternal' includes them all. It sets Him for ever apart from every other object of veneration and every form of authority that has existed or can arise amongst men.

So Moses received his answer; he was to go to Israel and tell them that the Eternal, who in ages past had led Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, was moving now to lead them. He is the Eternal and all that He decrees must surely come to pass and all that stands against His will must surely in the fulness of time be broken. That is a truth so important today when so much in the world of men seems destructive of the things of God with little outward sign that matters will ever change.

Moses was to go to Egypt to tell the elders of Israel of his experience and conversation with God. He must appear before Pharaoh. Moses' heart failed. "*But they will not believe me or listen to what I say ... they will say that it is not true that the LORD appeared to me*" (Ex. 4.1). Graciously

God gave him two miracles to strengthen his wavering faith. Not all Scriptural records that are popularly regarded as miracles are in fact clearly stated to be so in the Bible. Here we have an account in which God uses nature in a way which seems impossible to the natural mind. The Creator intervened with the known laws of His Creation. He had a point to make and so He made it. Moses was in need of evidence of the reality of Divine power and this was a demonstration needed to strengthen Moses' faith. God told him to throw his shepherd's staff upon the ground. He did so and it became a snake. Moses backed away in alarm. In an act of faith and obedience Moses picked it up by its tail and it returned to being his staff. Perhaps the second sign was more alarming. He was told to put his hand into his clothes and when he withdrew it, the hand was covered in leprosy. As instructed he placed the hand behind the folds of his clothing and when he drew it out the leprosy had gone. The power which changed natural elements into wine at Cana and restored to whole flesh the decaying body of Lazarus, could just as readily control those same elements to change a stick into a snake or wholesome flesh into a skin disease. The miracles had a purpose in the Divine scheme of things and God does such things when it is necessary. No amount of 'natural explanation' will show why brother Aaron could do the same thing in the Egyptian court later. There was to be a long succession of such events before Israel arrived in the land promised to them.

Moses was not yet convinced. He tried yet one more excuse. He had forgotten how to be eloquent. Events during the next forty years were to prove this untrue but God was ready for him. "*The Lord said 'Who is it that gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf? Who makes him keen-sighted or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Go now, I shall help you to speak and show you what to say'*" (Ex. 4.11,12). This too was part of God's intervention with a miracle. Moses seems to have reluctantly given in, but he still felt someone else could do it better. So God provided someone to share the commission, brother Aaron would go with him. It was not a surprising choice really. Aaron was to be High Priest, so as spokesman for Moses he would be given a vital role in the eyes of the people.

The interview with God was at an end. The voice from heaven spoke no more. The radiance of

the burning bush died away. Above him towered the crags of Horeb. As he surveyed the sheep and goats and the environment he had known for forty years, he must have realised that life as he had so known it, was now about to change. From now on there would be labour, sacrifice and suffering with

a different sort of shepherding. Yet this would be fulfilment of the dreams of his younger days. Like the maiden of Nazareth he might have breathed the prayer, *"I am the Lord's servant; may it be to me as you have said."*

(To be continued)

THE LONG SEARCH

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God"

1. Men search in vain

"Here we seek no continuing city but we seek one to come." (Heb. 13.14)

"Seek and you will find" is much quoted advice by Jesus to the multitudes who came to listen to Him. He must have looked upon those multitudes with more than compassion. They may have been in the helpless situation of sheep who had no shepherd but they were intelligent enough to do some seeking for themselves. There was a good deal missing from their lives, lack of which made them discontented and confused. They were in bondage to an oppressive nation and to a system of life that gave them many fears and little freedom. All around them men were seeking for honours, riches, social positions, fine clothes, top seats at banquets and the 'goods stored in bigger barns'. They liked to be seen as superior and ambitious, with lesser mortals in awe of their personal grandeur. They had slaves who trembled at their master's word, who ran hastily to do his bidding. Such was the unequal state of society that the poor envied the rich and the rich despised the poor.

When Jesus looked upon this system which men had set up, he saw it as a worthless thing, with outward trappings, fine houses, soft raiment and easy living for a privileged few. There was little or none of the Divine quality of love expressing justice, generosity, meekness and all the moral virtues. These are visible evidence of inner beauty and grace that are not subject to the accidents and assaults of time. Jesus opened His ministry preaching the kingdom of heaven. He taught by parables which were well known pictures of everyday events that illustrated that kingdom. They often began with *"The kingdom of heaven is like unto ..."* and whatever likeness He chose, His hearers understood that He spoke of earthly things endowed by a heavenly spirit of life which had so far eluded them. He spoke plainly and simply, yet

with confidence and authority. Even the prophets had not spoken in such terms. They who heard were ordinary people wrestling with everyday problems, beset by the fears and doubts, the longings and desires common to man and they heard Him gladly.

As a teacher and adviser He did not condemn their desire for more of the good things of life. The earth produced abundance for all and all had a right to a share in its riches. His mission was not to condemn but to give a more abundant life to all who accepted it on His terms. This was the will of the Creator of man, the Heavenly Father for His human family. So the advice was given *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well"*. (Matt. 6.33. NIV)

Rightness, purity of heart and conduct, honesty, a careful consideration of the rights of others and a wholesome respect for the law and order of Almighty God is the solid foundation of life. This is the rock upon which the whole edifice of life can be successfully built. No storm can uproot or overturn such a life securely anchored to what has sometimes been termed "the eternal verities". Justice and love are the foundation of God's kingdom. His throne, symbol of power, is built upon these rock-like principles and no forces of evil can prevail against them. Devils and men may assault them, ignore them, or defy them but they still stand. They will be "the same yesterday, today and forever".

Purity is the essence of this kingdom, the clean and peaceful contrast to the corruption of the kingdoms of this world. *"Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect"*. Perfection of human conduct is aimed at but not achieved, yet this is what God requires. Wherever there are men, sin abounds with all its miserable consequences.

Many jeer at sin, mock virtue and deride perfection. A hypocritical profession produces the scoffer and the cynic. Emotionalism, ritualism, fanaticism, eccentrics and extremists have made observers critical, doubtful of the wisdom of pursuing a course contrary to the natural tendency; to get all that there is to be got, to have a good time, while there is time, regardless of any present or future consequences. Admittedly there is a good deal to put people off the search for the kingdom of God, yet the ideal remains. The yard-stick of human conduct is the one set and maintained by Him who made man. It is a standard which will never be lowered. The whole tenor of the Word of God is seek. "Seek me and your heart shall live. Seek meekness, seek righteousness O inhabitant of the earth." God, love, light and life are synonymous. The first is the eternal fountain, the remainder the stream pouring out in a sparkling gush of living water to those whose hearts are ready to receive it. It is only when God is sought sincerely, wholeheartedly, with deep longing, that the flow begins into the living cistern of a mind in tune with His. Perhaps that is why so few find the full and satisfying stream of life. Much searching is half-hearted, easily discouraged. The attractions of the world lure the seeker to what seems fairer territory. It is a transient allurements and the treasure is never found.

To change the metaphor as Jesus often did, the corn fell by the wayside, or on stony ground, or among thorns and so was defeated in its ultimate purpose. There is always plenty of room on the narrow way. The crush is on the broad road that does not lead to the kingdom of God. In spite of all the advice the promises and the assurance, few have had the courage to seek first the kingdom of God. Many have lacked the tenacity to hold on, to endure to the end, to give their all not counting the cost. Most have never desired it, loving best the world, as it is, fearing change. Some have paid it lip service, thinking it a good thing for somebody but not for themselves, hoping that if ever it comes to pass it will not be in their time. So the kingdoms of this world are still the kingdoms of darkness, set in these latter days upon a collision course when men in their extremity will at last cry to the Lord and He will bring them to their desired haven.

That there is a haven, that there is at the heart of mankind a strong desire for something better than

the existing conditions seem patent by the constant state of change and struggle, the search for an ideal state of living never yet attained. The human race has always been in a state of flux. Its earliest records reveal man as a wanderer seeking change or having change thrust upon him. Whether it has been the urge to find 'fresh woods and pastures new' or to search for treasure beneath the earth's crust, daringly to probe the skies, to sail the seas in search of lost continents or to seek new ideologies, new forms of government, man has been forever on the move seeking for something to his advantage. Inquisitive, acquisitive or wantonly conquering, the search for new things; fresh ideas, richer territories or the questionable glory of power and triumph, have kept mankind in constant flow across the face of the earth. As immigrants seeking a promised land, as pilgrims seeking a sacred shrine, as homeless, fleeing for shelter before an invading army, or as exiles seeking a way back to a lost paradise, search has been and is the driving force.

The men who sought the pearl of great price and buried treasure were seekers who rejoiced in their findings with gladness of heart. The father's delight in finding his lost son and the angels rejoicing over a repentant sinner, were all facets of the same story; that of mutual search by God and man.

God's ideal of life is not want and misery but peace and plenty. These desirable blessings, the legitimate enjoyment of happiness, are a bonus, a generous supplement to those who seek first things first. They love God above all and obey the golden rule of "*Whatever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them*". They cherish what is good and just, pure and beautiful, as a treasure beyond price. When all seemed black and lost, somewhere there could be found thousands who have not bowed the knee to the gods of this world.

Jesus reserved His most scathing condemnations for the lovers of darkness, the deliberate evil doers, those who obstruct justice, the arrogant and greedy who show no mercy but exploit human need. His 'blessings' were for the poor, the persecuted, the mourners, the peacemakers, the pure and the meek, "*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*".

Had half of these noble principles been put into operation by the professedly Christian world over

the long centuries since they were first spoken, history would have told a different story with a happier ending. Knowing all things, He who came *to seek and to save the lost life and estate of man*, knew His gospel of the kingdom would be lost in a maze of misinterpretation, in an overcoat of creeds, patched with old pagan customs. He knew its spirit was too good for this world and that this world would largely reject it as it rejected Him. He knew only a few would truly seek the kingdom.

Life has been defined as a pilgrimage, more especially a *Christian pilgrimage towards the city of God*. To all has come the weariness of a traveller. Moments of doubt and days of despair have been a common experience. How many have been lost in the wilderness, fallen by the wayside or overpowered by a heart-breaking sense of futility. The epitaph of each generation has been *"Here we have no continuing city"*.

History does not deal with sentiment but with the stark facts of the rise and fall of empires and with the change and decay of passing ages, it is concerned with the inability of the most daring and determined of men to establish any lasting good, to erect any city that will at last not lie in the dust. The glory of departed kingdoms and the grandeur of their ruins are a silent testimony to the fact that *"Here we have no continuing city"*.

The archaeologists turn up the wonders of ancient days, marvelling that such splendours should topple, amazed at the minds which planned and the skill which constructed on such a *magnificent scale the streets, the temples and the palaces of a fabulous past*. Men and women view with a mixture of awe and curiosity these cities which once lifted their soaring columns to the heavens in a display of aggressive ostentation. They, like Capernaum were brought down to the dust; not only laid level with the earth but sunk beneath it into an obliterating obscurity. Fallen idols, pagan gods fashioned as images of the natural forces which gave life and controlling power to their civilisations, stare back at those who have sought them out of their tombs with a stony look of astonishment that such a thing could have happened to them. The pride and might of cities which knew not God have become subject to the spade, the crowbar and the rope, ignominiously hauled off to become museum pieces in other cities which may well follow in disasters because of

human inability to control the products of its own knowledge.

Cities in Bible language are governments, systems, religions and political ideas which have established rule over the nations. The names of their capitals, the outward expression of their faiths and ideologies have about them a ring of greatness, a fascination even in their ruins which captivated imagination. That such powers have declined, such systems failed, leaving only their skeleton fingers pointing the lesson of change and decay, *proves that some element essential to their survival was missing*. The prophets have never been popular. Their forecasts must always have been unwelcome and their denunciations bitterly resented. Human nature as at present constituted resents rebuke or interference with its self chosen ways. It becomes touchy about such words as wrong and sin. Yet these are the seeds of destruction which every regime has nourished to its own undoing.

Like so many doctors round a dissecting table, historians subject past empires to critical examination, seeking the causes of the maladies which brought them to their end. Whatever their conclusions the disease remains the same for it is transgression of Divine and moral laws written into the statute book of human conscience. "Selfishness" says one of these doctors, "is the age-long cause of decay of communities". "The great instrument of all these changes" says another, "is the peculiar venom of party, the bitter spirit of self interest oppression and treachery. This is the spirit that entirely reverses all the principles which a benevolent Nature has erected within us. Honesty, equality of justice, even the ties of society and natural affections". While such venom does its deadly work, all the dreams, the ideals, the hopes, the efforts to establish an eternal city must fade and crumble away by slow decay or *with catastrophic suddenness*.

(To be concluded)

FAS

"To find the Maker and Father of this universe is a hard task; and when you have found him it is impossible to speak of him before all people."

BIBLE TEACHING ON HELL

A short essay

For many centuries it was thought, and even in some Christian circles is still believed, that it was God's purpose to punish sinners by eternal misery and separation from all that was good and right and holy. After a few short years spent on earth, often in unfavourable and distressing conditions, the offender is condemned without further opportunity of development or reform to a hopeless and unthinkable destiny. Many so punished would be without adequate opportunity to discover true knowledge of right doing and holiness. This teaching has driven some to scepticism and atheism and is a stigma on the name of God who was recorded as saying *"I have no desire for the death of the wicked. I would rather that the wicked should mend their ways and live."* (Ezekiel 33.11). It is not easy to reconcile that sentiment with the vision of a ruthless autocrat who inflicts pain and punishments without end, upon men and women who may never have had an adequate opportunity to rise out of their native environment to better things.

It is important to realise that the purpose of God is not merely the selection of a few good folk to go to heaven and the relegation of all the remainder to 'conscious misery eternal in duration' as the old dogma has it. It is rather the creation of a race of beings that through the sufferings and discipline of the world as it now is, will come to accept the principles of righteousness. These are the laws of God, of the Universe and of all creation and are reached by Jesus Christ's reign in the Golden Age yet to come. Harmony with man's outer environment and his inner harmony with God bring life in full perfection forever. Conversely, failure willingly to accept this offer of sinless life implies that the one concerned wishes to remain sinful, the penalty for which is death. When it is seen that the cessation of existence is the end of the individual who does not renounce sin after a full opportunity has been given and that this is a basic law in God's creation, the concept of Hell as a place of conscious punishment disappears.

It should not be thought that this Hell of fire and brimstone, of devils and lost souls, of torments unspeakable, had its origin in the words of Jesus and the Apostles. The idea is much older. To

understand why this teaching became so prominent as a part of Christian theology, it is necessary to go back to the earlier religious faiths that preceded Christianity. The great civilisations which were before Rome:- Sumeria, Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia and Persia had in their religious systems a very definite belief in the existence of malignant gods who had to be propitiated and appeased if hardship in this life was to be avoided. The intense belief in devils and all kinds of supernatural wickedness that characterised these religions made it easy to imagine a region where the spirits of the dead would be entirely at the mercy of such malevolent powers. Devotees of such faiths were wedded to the forms and ceremonies which it was believed would avert this dreaded fate. When the teachings of Jesus and His Apostles began to be formulated into creeds and confessions of faith, to regularise the beliefs of the Christian church, it was difficult to avoid incorporating these old beliefs as explanatory of Jesus and the apostles' words respecting the penalty of sin. It also made the transition to Christianity easier and the priests of that day realised what a potent weapon the of Hell could become in their hands.

In marked contrast to these gloomy views of life after death is the attitude of the Hebrew nation from earlier times. The Old Testament abounds with references to 'sheol', the Hebrew word used for 'Hell' in the Authorised Version, but nowhere does it imply a place of torment. The Hebrews had no such idea in their theology. They described death as a sleep, to be followed by an awakening at the 'last day' when the promises of God to their fathers would be fulfilled. It is true that in later works of Judaism such as the apocryphal 'Book of Enoch' there are passages describing a fiery abode and torments for evil angels and men. These books were written only a few centuries before Christ when some admixture of pagan thought had taken place. In the Hebrew Scriptures 'sheol' always denotes the grave or death state, and is described as a condition of unconsciousness, release coming only by resurrection of the dead. The word occurs sixty five times in the Old Testament being translated thirty one times 'hell', thirty one times 'grave' and three times 'pit'. In no case does the

nature of its occurrence demand anything more than a reference to the state of death. The one instance usually adduced to the contrary (Psalm 9.17) "*The wicked shall be turned into hell; all the nations that forget God*" being a reference to the law of creation already referred to, that the only possible end for the wilful sinful individual is the cessation of his existence.

'Hell' in the New Testament is translated from the Greek 'Hades', 'Gehenna' and 'Tartarus'. 'Hades' is the equivalent of the Hebrew 'Sheol' and is used in quotations from the Old Testament. It occurs ten times as 'hell' and once as 'grave'. In eight instances it is obvious that the death state is intended. In one case (Rev. 20.14) the statement that Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire implies a time when the power of death and its attendant the grave, will be forever broken. Indeed this is the theme of the triumphant exclamation of Paul in 1 Cor. 15.55, "*O death where is thy sting? O grave (Hades) where is thy victory?*" The remaining instance is of a different order. It occurs in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and for this reason is worthy of a brief examination. The parable is really an allegory and its primary lesson must obviously have had some meaning for those who first heard it. To consider that Lazarus is received into heaven merely on account of his poverty and Dives into hell for being rich is an absurdity. A more reasonable explanation is that Jesus was giving His hearers, in the manner beloved of the East, a symbolic word-picture of something they already half knew to be true even although its truth was unwelcome to them. The rich man fitly pictured their own nation, recipients of the favours of God and in a particular sense the chosen people of God as they firmly believed. To them the Gentile nations were as the beggar crouching at the door. But in the course of time this condition of affairs was reversed. The Jews became dispersed among all nations and to this day have been "*in torments*". The beggar on the other hand was received into "Abraham's bosom", a rabbinical expression indicating acceptance and favour with God. True to the story, such special favour as the Jews possessed in having a prior opportunity to receive the person and message of Christ passed to the despised Gentiles shortly afterward. The reference to hell is a metaphor used to indicate the subsequent two thousand years of

national distress upon the people of Israel.

Twelve times in the New Testament the word 'hell' is translated from the Greek word *Geenna* (or 'Gehenna'). This is from the Hebrew 'Ge-Hinnom', the name of a deep ravine to the south of Jerusalem into which refuse of the city was thrown and destroyed by the continual fires which were kept burning there. Refuse that fell on the rock ledges and was not reached by the fire was soon destroyed by worms which quickly multiplied under the Eastern sun. Hence the expression "*to be cast into Gehenna*" was synonymous with utter destruction, and the blazing valley, especially at night, very readily suggested the concept of a "*lake of fire*". If the words of Jesus are examined with this in mind it can be seen that He used the expression "Gehenna" in a metaphorical sense as a symbol of destruction and not of everlasting conscious torment.

The one remaining instance of 'hell' in the New Testament is in 2 Peter 2.4 where the writer speaks of the "*angels that sinned*" being "*cast down to hell*". The word here is '*tartaroo*' verbal form for Tartarus, a reference to the classical Greek idea of a prison abyss, far below the earth where the Titans, who in Greek mythology rebelled against God, were imprisoned. Jewish thought in the days of the First Advent held that '*tartarus*' was the place where the angels that sinned in the days of the Flood were imprisoned, awaiting their final judgment, and this is the meaning of the reference in Peter's letter.

In harmony with this view of the nature of 'hell' in the Bible, the way is prepared to receive the message preached so definitely by Christ himself. "*The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God... and shall come forth*". The reign of Christ the King will be the signal for Hell to open its gates and for all who have slept in death to come forth. In wonderment and perhaps in bewilderment at first they will come with increasing joy as they learn of the new Kingdom which, with sin, disease and death removed, will become the "*desire of all nations*". In fine language the prophet Hosea (13.14) expresses the purpose of God and His determination to bring to an end the dominion of sin and death. "*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O*

death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction:" and John in the Book of Revelation adds "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow

nor sighing, for the former things have passed away."

A.O.H.

THE SAVING POWER OF GOD

*A study of the
Work of Christ*

3. The Teachings of Jesus and Paul

The cross of Jesus Christ is central to Paul's teachings as he made clear to the Galatians when he sought to re-establish the unadulterated Gospel among them. Christian brethren from Judea had deceived them by insisting that all believers, Jews and Gentiles, must keep the Law of Moses. So he wrote, "*far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Gal. 6.14). To the church at Corinth, who felt they had superior knowledge to other believers, he wrote similarly, "*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" (1 Cor. 2.2) These may sound simple statements compared with the profound explanations of the letter to the Romans, yet all Paul's writings have this same basic underlying feature.

While direct statements made by Jesus are hard to find in Paul's writings underlying principles are clearly the same. Some have suggested that Paul placed greater emphasis upon human sinfulness than did Jesus. Others believe that Paul's special revelation, found in his later letters was a different Gospel from that preached by Jesus and the early apostles. Paul knew James, the Lord's brother and there really is no disagreement between their writings. James is said to be like those who insisted on the Law because of his insistence that faith should be demonstrated by works. Paul however often followed his doctrinal teaching about forgiveness through grace by exhortation to active faith (Gal. 5.6). Paul was also acquainted with Peter and the other apostles; (Acts 15) and at the Council of Jerusalem there was no disagreement between them as to what should be preached (Gal. 2.2). Paul criticised Peter and Barnabas for their failure to put belief into practice but not for what they taught. The roots of Paul's preaching were in the teachings of the Lord he loved and served. From the records of the Gospels we find the foundation of all that follows in the New Testament. Paul's objection to what had been preached by the Judean teachers in the churches of Galatia was their insistence upon such rituals as

circumcision but not in what they said about Jesus and His teaching. It was their 'additions' to the Gospel which he strongly denounced.

The main thrust of preaching and teaching to unbelievers by the early Christians was the demonstration that Jesus was Messiah, foretold in the Old Testament. In the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth lay the salvation of mankind and the only possible response to that was repentance and reconciliation to God. This simple proclamation of the Good News, that was intended to bring unbelievers to conversion, followed a similar pattern throughout the Gospels and letters of Paul. Modern scholars have called this material used in preaching, the *kerygma*, a word used by Jesus about Jonah's work and by Paul when writing about the proclamation of the Gospel. (Luke 11.32; Romans 16.25). Examination of Peter's speeches recorded in Acts, chapters 2 and 3, show that they are similar in content to Paul's references to the Gospel in his letters (1 Cor. 15.3) and they both follow the '*kerygma*' formula. Scholars believe that the body of teaching used to instruct those already converted is also clearly shown in the New Testament and again they use a word from those writings - 'the *didache*'. This word is found in Romans 6.17 and is used by Jesus throughout the Gospels. It concerns the moral issues of the New Testament and the building up of believers in their Christian life. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and what he had to say and write to believers and unbelievers was necessarily adapted to the needs of those who heard him speak and read his letters. This is specially so in his addresses at Lystra and Athens and in certain passages in his letters for example 1 Corinthians chapters 1-3.

Paul's activities among the Gentiles brought him into head-on dispute with Jewish Christian believers who were convinced that all followers of Christ should keep the Mosaic law. There is no evidence, however, that Paul's opponents ever protested against his teachings about Christ (Acts

21.17-22). Much of Paul's teaching on the Atonement in his letters is found in the midst of other subjects. This was because Paul was not writing a doctrinal treatise so much as sorting out wrong ideas and practices. Nevertheless what he says about the work of Christ was evidently accepted as being right and consistent with the other leaders of the early Church. Agreement among New Testament writings shows that it was the Lord himself who was responsible for establishing the material of the Gospel, clearly and plainly to all, including Paul who received a personal revelation (Gal. 1.11-17).

This viewpoint is strengthened by an examination of Jesus' own words in relation to what Paul writes concerning belief that His death was for the redemption of the world. Paul is quite clear about man's sinfulness as witnessed by Romans 3.23, "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" and what he says about the 'works of the flesh' in the Corinthian letters. Jesus takes a similar view of sin and in the disputed passage in John 8, He tells the woman to "*go and sin no more*". He recognised more than anyone the uncleanness of human hearts (Mark 7.21). Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount identify human depravity. He "*knew what was in man*" (John 2.25) and saw more deeply than any other, the great human need.

Jesus and Paul regarded sin in terms of breaking the Law. There is a significant similarity in their approach to the way in which the Law should be kept, for both were concerned about the moral demands of the Law. Jesus spoke to the Pharisees of their responsibilities of filial love and did not accept the excuse of offering gifts to God. In a similar way Paul recognised the just demands of the Law in that the "*Law is holy and the commandment is holy, just and good.*" (Rom. 7.7-11). On the other hand Jesus said that the law was fulfilled in the love we express towards God and man (Mark 12.30,31), while Paul sees the same objective reached by "*he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law*" (Romans 13.8). Although Jesus and Paul insist that the law must be kept, they both emphasise the 'doctrine of grace'. Paul's teaching about grace is summarised in Ephesians 2.5-8 where he writes "*by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing.*" and this is further explained in

Romans 11.6. While there is no explicit teaching about grace in the Gospels, Jesus' parable of the 'Prodigal Son' is unmistakably that of grace offered by the father to the younger son. The attitude of the older son in the story is similar to Jews who sought to earn God's favour. The pharisees' problem concerning Jesus forgiving people's sins (Luke 5.20-24; 7.47-50) was His willingness to freely forgive sinners who in the eyes of the 'religious men' needed to earn that forgiveness by doing what the Law commanded. The idea was forever erased by the way He forgave those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23.34).

Further study of Jesus' sayings about His own suffering and death shows how much Paul depended upon His Lord for his teachings. Jesus was not only aware of His impending death, warning His close disciples several times of what was to happen, (Mark 8.31) but knew that He was part of an irresistible movement towards the dramatic climax. Further warnings were given by Jesus to the disciples recorded in Mark 9.31 and 10.33.

It was at this time that Jesus spoke of the baptism that He should be baptized with and the cup that He should drink. When Jesus was baptized by John at the beginning of His ministry, He heard the words taken from the Servant Song, pronounced by the Heavenly voice (Mark 1.11; Isaiah 42.1). Jesus seems to have known then, the implications for Himself of Isaiah 53 in that Song. From the earliest days of the Church, the first disciples realised that when Jesus said that He must suffer and be killed it was more than the wrath of His enemies that would accomplish this. They saw through the Holy Spirit, the events of Passover time, only a few weeks before, had been the result of a definite plan according to the foreknowledge of God. (Acts 2.23). To this Paul added his own testimony when he wrote "*in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself*" (2 Cor. 5.18). Jesus and the early Church, including Paul, shared the belief that it was God who took the initiative to free mankind from the clutches of sin and death. Paul bore further witness to this when he wrote that Jesus gave "*himself for our sins, to deliver us from the present age, according to the will of our God and Father*".

The baptism of suffering and death which Jesus was to experience, is linked to the metaphor of

'the cup' by which He showed that suffering must precede Messianic glory (Mark 10.38). Jesus not only saw the purpose of God being outworked in His own life but in the lives of those who would share the ultimate triumph with Him who must also experience His sufferings. Zebedee's sons felt that they had a prior claim to important posts in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus made it clear that participation with Him in the messianic work involved things that would neither be popular nor offer political power in this world. It is quite remarkable the way in which Jesus used the 'Suffering Servant' figure particularly in Mark 10.43-45. The same teaching was used in the early church (Acts 3.13,26; 4.27-30; 8.32-35) even to explicit reference to Isaiah 53 and this must bear testimony that Jesus in close fellowship with the disciples had shown that His work was the fulfilment of the Servant Song prophecy. Paul doesn't make specific reference to this aspect of Jesus' teaching, but his expressions in Philippians 2.7-9 have the same characteristic humiliation and glory and carry the connection to 'slave' as in Mark 10.45.

Jesus' answer to James and John, together with His references to the disciples taking up the cross to follow the Master are important glimpses of the teaching which was to come later through the pen of Paul. They do not imply the inevitability of martyrdom nor can such suffering have the same implications in God's redemptive purpose as it had for Jesus. But Paul takes up and expands the theme, which is not surprising after hearing Jesus say to him on the Damascus road "*Why are you persecuting me?*". In Galatians 2.20, Paul writes to those wayward brethren who had removed the power of the cross from the Gospel, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*". He wrote the same theme to Philippi (3.10) "*that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*" It is evident from Paul's words in 2 Timothy 2.11,12 that such thoughts were being incorporated into 'faithful sayings' of the first century Church.

The uniqueness of Jesus' sacrifice is shown in His reference to 'ransom' in Mark 10.45. The Greek word from which it is translated is 'lutron'

and is connected with the manumission of slaves but the preposition 'anti' probably gives it a more sacrificial meaning. Although this passage gives clear teaching that Christians must share in the sufferings of Christ, yet the use of this word implies a sacrificial service that Jesus does for men that which they are unable to do for themselves. It is a strongly Hebrew idea in this text based upon the practice in Israel of 'redeeming a kinsman'.

Jesus' remarks in Mark 10 must have been inspired by Isaiah 53 which deal with the plight of mankind, and in particular the words "*yet he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors*" (53.12). To all this Paul gave unparalleled testimony in that the only other use of the word 'ransom' in the New Testament occurs in his letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 2.5,6) "*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all men, the testimony given in its proper time.*" The ideas connected with manumission are even more impressive in 1 Cor. 6.20 where Paul wrote "*you were bought with a price*" and again in 7.23 "*you were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men*". This theme links with 1 Peter 1.18,19 and demonstrates yet again how Paul's teaching agrees with the first apostles. Perhaps the most impressive of all texts to describe Christ's work is found in Ephesians 1.7, "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*". In these texts Paul is not proclaiming a new gospel but bringing together the words of the Lord, at which Jesus had barely been able to hint in His earthly ministry.

In 1 Cor. 11.24,25 we have an almost identical parallel of Jesus' words at the Last Supper found in Mark 14.24. There is a slight variation in the precise wording, so what did Jesus actually say? Paul's letter was written about 55AD and his teaching about the Lord's supper dates back to about 51AD. Mark's Gospel is probably a decade later. Authorities on the text have no doubt that both accounts are genuine original accounts of what took place and provide some words of explanation by Jesus himself of the symbolism of the bread and wine. Mark has yet another reference to Isaiah 53.12 in the words 'the many' which is absent from Paul's record. The Apostle on the other hand includes the expression "*new covenant*"

which seems to have a direct reference to Jeremiah 31.31 but is not present in Mark's account. Both passages contain the teaching of the covenant but that which had been made between God and His people in the desert (Exodus chapters 19, 24 and 34) had been broken. There was a need for the law to be written on the hearts of God's people. The intimate knowledge of God, foreshadowed by Jeremiah (9.23,24; 22.15,16) was expanded in the discourse of Jesus at the Last Supper (John chapters 14-17). The early church reinforced the view contained in the shared bread and wine, that the church shared the sufferings of its Lord (Acts 5.41; 9.16) and Paul's words in Romans 6.3-6 develop the principle which sprang from Jesus.

The great cry of desolation that Jesus made just before He died has been considerably debated. The early church must have found some explanation of our Lord's death in Psalm 22. The text of Matthew 27.46 reveals the way in which Jesus entered into the darkness of human experience. It may have some connection with Paul's equally controversial remarks in 2 Corinthians 5.21, "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.*" The apostle here has a direct basis for his sacrificial and representative interpretation of the cross of which

he has much to say. Coupled with Jesus' great cry is His agony in Gethsemane in which He expressed profound human grief. The Garden and the Cross support the belief that the early Church was aware of the stark nature of Christ's temptation. The writer of the Hebrews bears witness to this in Hebrews 4.15; 5.7-9.

Paul's gospel was based on Jesus' teaching given to the disciples before He reached His final sacrifice on Calvary. Jesus and His first followers found in the Hebrew Scriptures the reasons for and the expectation of Messianic suffering and victory over death. Paul shared those convictions and was able to enter into his Lord's experiences in an exceptional way. That may be the reason for the words to the Galatians about "the marks of Jesus" in his body (6.17). Just before that in verse 14, Paul sums up the believer's involvement in the sufferings of Christ. To the first Christians the doctrine of the Atonement was much more than a matter of belief and understanding. Paul's distinct contribution to that understanding of the 'work of Christ' did not change anything that had already been laid down by Jesus and the first apostles but expanded their teaching and made it more relevant.

THE SILOAM INSCRIPTION

*The Voice of
Archaeology*

Deep down in the limestone strata that underlies Jerusalem an inexhaustible supply of fresh water forces its way through cracks and crevices, following the general slope of the rock layers toward the south-east, until at length it comes to the surface at what is now known as the Virgin's Fountain. From the dawn of history that water has flowed. It was the main source of supply for the Jebusite city of Jerusalem, ruled by the Priest-King of Abraham's day. It once served the Crusaders' need when Saracens besieged Jerusalem. Today, it waters the market gardens of Jerusalem. It has made Biblical history.

The Virgin's Fountain lies halfway up the rocky slope of Ophel, the south-eastern projection of the mountainous mass upon which Jerusalem is built and outside the ancient walls. In the dim days before Abraham entered Canaan the industrious Jebusites had cut a tunnel into the mountain to conduct the waters to the foot of a vertical shaft which they had made leading up to the city on the

heights above. They called it Gihon, and by its means they were able in times of siege to obtain water without venturing outside the walls. It was their undoing eventually, for when David beset the city, Joab and his stalwarts made their way along the tunnel, climbed up that shaft and took the Jebusites by surprise, so capturing the city for David (1 Chron. 11.6 and 2 Samuel 5.8). The 'gutter' in this latter text is 'the shaft'.

It was at a later date that the fountain demanded a king's anxious thoughts. In the days of Hezekiah, Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah with his armies. Once again Jerusalem was threatened with siege. The first thing to do was to ensure the water supply. The measures Hezekiah took to accomplish this end were considered so noteworthy as to justify incorporation in the histories of the times. Writes the chronicler, (2 Chron. 32.4, 30) "*There was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the*

land, saying 'Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?' Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourses of Gihon (the shaft into the city) and brought it straight down (underground is the literal meaning) to the west side of the city of David". The Book of Kings supplements this by saying (2 Kings 20.20) when recounting the deeds of Hezekiah "... the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and how he made a pool, and a conduit (aqueduct) and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah." In the Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus 48.17 informs us that "Hezekiah fortified his city, and brought in water to the midst thereof; he dug the hard rock with iron and made wells for waters".

King Hezekiah's tunnelling operations, interesting as they must have been to the people of his own day, had little or no interest for more recent generations and the story was speedily relegated to the background by students. In later times, however, speculation began as to whether this tunnel had any real existence. The critics dubbed it legend; others were not so sure; but there was no external evidence. Dr. W. M. Thomson, the Palestine missionary and author of the well-known work *"The Land and the Book"* says of the water channels and fountains of Jerusalem, when describing his own investigation, "Hezekiah and his 'much people' stopped them up so effectually that they could never be found again, even by the Jews themselves." The historians of the Old Testament had left no geographical indication of the locality of the tunnel, at least, it was accepted that no such indication existed until someone reading the familiar words of Isa. 8.6 "*Forasmuch as this people refuse the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son ...*" realised that here was a clue. "*The waters of Shiloah that go softly*"!

The Pool of Shiloah (Siloam is the New Testament Greek form of the word) was well known and had been well known for generations. It was, and is, the most constant reservoir in the city. Artificially built, more like a tank than a natural pool, some fifty feet by twenty, and about twenty feet deep, it has served the needs of generations of Jews and Arabs without question. It was common knowledge that the water reached the pool from the mouth of an arched orifice in the

rock, but no one had ever dared to venture far inside. So far as can be ascertained, the first to make the attempt was Dr. Robinson, early in the nineteenth century. Stepping into the water of Siloam, he waded into the archway and found himself in a narrow tunnel, two feet wide by ten to fifteen feet high, the stream that supplied the Pool flowing along its floor. He followed the winding course of the passage for about one third of a mile, knowing that from the direction he took that he was some hundred feet or more beneath the streets of Jerusalem above. At length he splashed his way into daylight again and found himself at the Virgin's Fountain, outside the city and on the steep slope of the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Later on it was ascertained that the first hundred feet or so of the tunnel at the Virgin's Fountain end, is in fact the ancient Jebusite aqueduct. The vertical shaft leading up into the city was discovered and there were signs that the old tunnel had been blocked at that point in order to divert the waters to the Pool of Siloam. The correspondence here with the account of Hezekiah's action recorded in 2 Chron. 32 seemed almost complete.

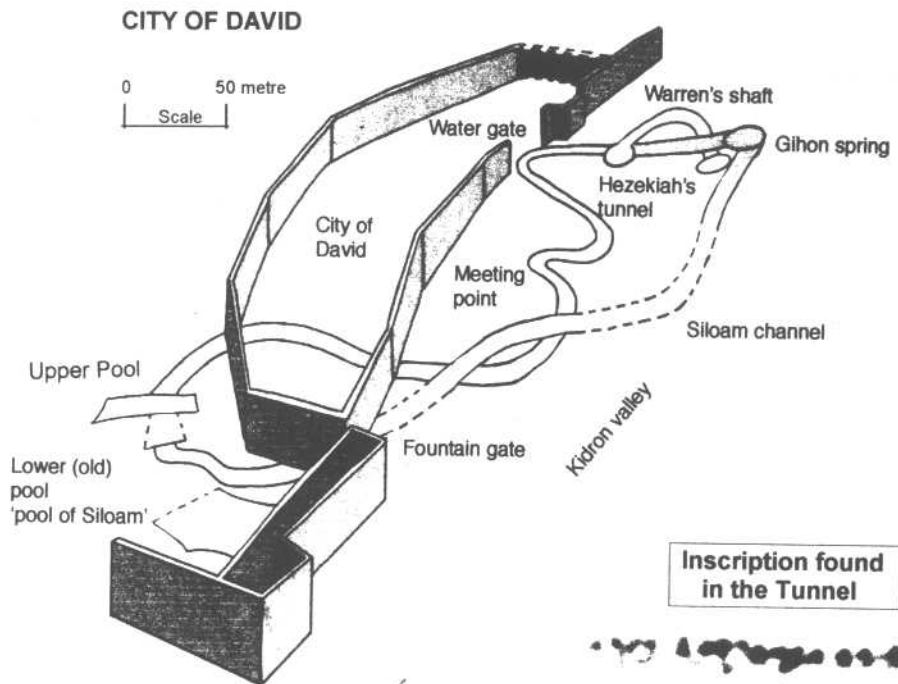
Then in 1880 some Arab schoolboys were playing around the Pool of Siloam and one of them fell into the water. Scrambling out, he ventured, boy-like, into the tunnel and clambering along its wall, noticed what no one had ever noticed before, some rough Hebrew characters chiseled in the rock. He told his teacher, Dr. Schick, who investigated for himself. He found a complete inscription in archaic Hebrew characters. The following year Dr. A. H. Sayce the celebrated archaeologist, visited the spot and copied the inscription. When examined it proved to be an account relating to the building of the tunnel, written in Biblical Hebrew of the 8th to 6th centuries BC. Since Hezekiah's reign falls within this period there remained no reasonable doubt that the tunnel was in fact the one described in the Old Testament as built by Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion.

Various translations of the inscription differ in minor details. Here is a fair representation. "*Behold the tunnel. Now this is the history of the tunnel. While the miners were still lifting up the pick, each towards his neighbour, and while there were yet three cubits to excavate there was heard*

the voice of a man calling to his neighbour, for there was an excess in the rock on the right hand, and on the left. And after that on the day of excavating the miners had struck pick against pick, one against another, the waters flowed from the spring to the pool, a distance of twelve hundred cubits. And a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the tunnel."

Those miners must have worked hard! Spurred on by the imminent threat of invasion, they excavated tons of rock to make that tunnel. Every bit of that material must have been passed in baskets along a line of men to the open air. When the work was done someone from among them, a man perhaps for ever unknown, left this writing, chiseled in the everlasting rock, to give its witness in due time to the accuracy of the Bible story.

These explorations yielded another detail of interest in relation to the New Testament. The account of Christ healing the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda is well known. The Pool was famous because at intervals, said the Evangelist, an angel came down and troubled the waters. Whoever first stepped in after the troubling was cured of his complaint. Such a phenomenon as is thus described is seen daily at the Virgin's Fountain and the Pool of Siloam. Somewhere far underground beneath Jerusalem, where the water that supplies these fountains collects, there must be a great reservoir shaped by Nature into the form of



a siphon. Periodically, generally two or three times a day the water comes gushing into the Virgin's Fountain and from there through the tunnel into the Pool of Siloam as though a hidden store had been let loose. The strange twist of nature has never been discovered but signs are conclusive that the water builds up slowly until it overtops some bend in the outlet and then the whole accumulation siphons away. The situation of the Pool of Bethesda is not established with certainty, even though it was in some other part of the city. The probability is that it received its supply from the same ultimate source as Hezekiah's pool, and the 'troubling of the waters' occur there, just as today it still occurs while the villagers of Siloam satisfy their needs at the place made famous by Judah's pious king.



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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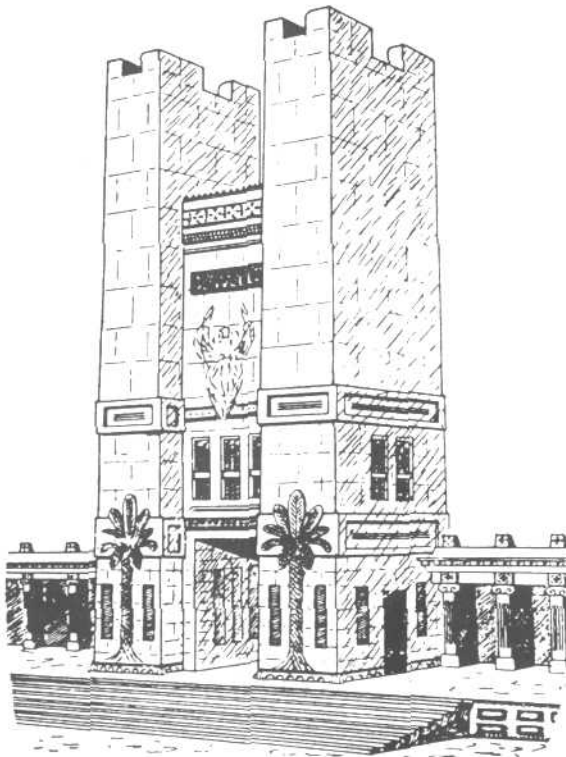
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Thought for the Month

"Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done." (Ezra 7.23) Coming from a heathen monarch, Artaxerxes of Persia, in the fourth century BC, that is a rather remarkable statement. The king rendered his own devotions to Ahura-Mazda, the deity of the Persians, nevertheless he recognised the God of Israel in matters with which Israel was concerned and he directed that those entrusted with such matters should be diligent in dealing with them. He was not content with merely giving permission for the re-organisation of the Jewish State, nor even with issuing an instruction to his local provincial governors to furnish the Jews with the necessities they would require from the king's stores. All were to be diligent in executing his instructions because they were also the command of the God of heaven. Any dissidents were to be dealt with summarily. It appears that Ezra had the power to inflict death, banishment, confiscation and imprisonment upon the insubordinate. It seems that this unusually zealous king, in his passion for the progress of God's work, was saying to his subjects, "You are going to serve your God and like it ... or else!"

Ignoring that tailpiece, the exhortation itself is a 'must' for every Christian. There can be no half-heartedness in the service of Christ. There was a first century Church at Laodicea whose members were like the spa waters of their own city, sometimes hot and sometimes cold, and the Lord would have none of it. *"How I wish you were cold or hot"* - either one or the other. Then He would

know where He stood. They were neither, so He rejected them. It is so fatally easy to delude ourselves into thinking that providing we give mental assent to our acceptance of Jesus as Saviour, attend meetings and fellowship with His people, that is all He requires. As if that is any good at all to Him when there is a world to be saved. Salvation can only come when instruction has been given and conversion effected. He has ordained that instructors and evangelists shall be prepared and trained here and now for that work of the future when He returns in glory for the establishment of His earthly kingdom. When the Lord called His first disciples He bade them leave everything and follow Him. He asks nothing less now. When Isaiah saw the vision of God Most High and heard Him enquiring for a messenger to execute a commission, the young prophet came forward with the spontaneous response *"Here am I! Send me"*. The result of that was forty years of incessant and diligent labour for his Lord in the power of an understanding of the future, perhaps greater than that of any other Hebrew prophet. So now, the Lord asks our unconditional consecration to His service and that all our life shall be spent in diligent devotion to that service. So, and only so, shall we be fitted for our greater work in the world beyond this, when our present lesson time is ended. As the wise king of Israel once said (Proverbs 12.24) *"Diligent hands will rule; but laziness ends in slave labour."*

AOH

Gone from us

Brother Sydney Walker (Australia - Nottingham)
Sister Olive Seymour (Sheringham - Peterborough)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

'TALKING BOOKS' The 'Bible Study Monthly' is now recorded for the benefit of blind and partially sighted friends. We are very grateful to the reader who works on this project. Most of one issue can be recorded on a 120 cassette. Readers may know of someone who might appreciate this service. All enquiries please to the Barnstone address.

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

Amos 9.11-15

11. The Tabernacle of David

At last Amos comes through into the light. He stands in the full glory and splendour of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. The judgements of Israel, her captivities and her tribulations, are in the past. She enters now upon her glorious destiny, to be a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Purified and made perfect by her experiences, she is now the tool in God's hand that He purposed from the beginning.

"In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down; and will build it up as in the ancient days, that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me, saith the Lord who does all these things." This is the Greek Septuagint rendering of vv.11-12, and it differs in one respect from the A.V., which is from a later Hebrew text. The latter has it *"that they (Israel) may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called"* without anything being said as to the *"earnestly seek me"* of those same Gentiles. The difference is highlighted by the fact that when James, at the early church conference in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, quoted this passage, he did so from the Septuagint. This was the version used in his day, and so made it the basis of his whole argument respecting the position of the Gentiles in the Divine Plan (Acts 15.13-21).

It is evident that the Septuagint rendering is the correct one. It is in line with the revealed purpose of God both for Israel and for the whole world. It denotes the restoration of a purified and dedicated Israel to the Holy Land at the end of this Age ready for a major part in the proclamation of the Gospel to the entire world of men, who are pictured as then being ready for it. This is the work of the Millennium. The original Hebrew text, prior to the appearance of the Greek Septuagint, evidently read this way. The corrupted text as it now stands in the modern Hebrew text was probably made in the interests of a narrow Jewish nationalism at some time during the early centuries of the Christian era when the idea of Gentiles sharing in the munificence of God could not be tolerated. It was easy to change the Hebrew word *"adam"* for

"man" into *"edom"* the enemy country; that only involved the alteration of some vowels. Likewise it was a simple change to read *"yarush"* (possess) instead of *"darash"* (seek). The whole sense of the passage was thereby transformed from the concept of Israel evangelizing the nations to that of Israel conquering the nations in order to lord it over them, which is a very different thing.

"In that day" says God *"will I raise up the tabernacle of David"*. This expression, *"in that day"*, when used in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, almost always refers to the ending of this present Age and the duration of the Millennium which follows it. It denotes a period during which the Lord brings this existing world-order to an end and institutes His own reign of righteousness and peace in its place. Under the Messianic administration of Christ, *"whosoever will"* shall be led to the Lord to inherit everlasting life. Isaiah, the golden-tongued prophet of that future day, uses the phrase some thirty-eight times of which only about four do not apply. Ezekiel uses it five times and Zechariah thirteen times all referring to the end of this Age or to the Age to come. The prophets looked forward with fervent anticipation to the day of Christ's Kingdom on earth and they uttered, with great longing, the words, rich in meaning *"in that day"*.

The fallen *"tabernacle of David"* is to be raised up, its ruins rebuilt, its former glory, and more, restored. The word *"sukkah"* has two senses in the OT. It means primarily a booth or a shelter made of tree branches and is used thus in connection with the shelters constructed by the Israelites for use during the annual seven-day *"Feast of Tabernacles"* in the autumn of the year. That feast was somewhat equivalent to the Christian harvest festival. It was a period of thanksgiving and rejoicing for the successful completion of the year's work and the ingathering of the harvest. The word was also used to describe the ornate structures that accommodated the king and his retinue in the field, in time of war. Such instances are usually translated *"pavilion"*. The tabernacle of David is his royal pavilion, symbol of his regal position, and by extension, of his dynasty and the kingship of his descendants. The dynasty of David

came to an end with Jehoiachin who was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar and died in Babylon. At that point the tabernacle of David crumbled into ruins, and thus remains until, to use the words of the Lord to Ezekiel, *"He come whose right it is"* (Ezekiel 21.27). The tabernacle of David, the royal kingly power of his line, will be raised up and re-established in the day that Christ takes to Himself His great power and commences His rule over the nations, and that is the meaning of the promise here. So says Isaiah *"it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, ... and all nations shall flow to it"* (Isaiah 2.2). Zechariah, in his vision of the End Time when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of God, declares that *"the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them"* (Zech. 12.8). One can picture the celestial rule and control of our Lord, with His glorified Church, manifested upon earth in the persons of His earthly representatives. They are hinted at in Scripture as being certain stalwart men of God of ancient times who by reason of their loyalty and uprightness have become *"princes in all the earth"* (Psalm 45.16) to administer Divine government amongst men. These will stand as the visible house of David appearing *"as God, as the angel of the Lord"* in the sight of men, and they will behold in these the rebuilt tabernacle of David. An apparently isolated text in Isaiah illustrates the position. *"In mercy shall the throne be established; and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David; judging and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness"* (Isaiah 16.5).

So, under the influence and leadership of the tabernacle of David, the remainder of men will earnestly seek God. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this statement. It implies quite positively that the duty and privilege of this restored Israel is to evangelize the nations and bring them to God. The purpose of the Millennial Age is to present all men, the entire human race of all generations back to the beginning, with the final opportunity to become reconciled to God through Christ and so attain life in the eternal state. None will be compelled; *"he that is filthy, let him be filthy still"* (Rev. 22.11) but nothing that defiles will ever enter the holy city (Rev. 21.27). At the end of that Age all who have

been alien from God and who can possibly be led to repentance and conversion, reconciled and accepted into the Divine family, will possess eternal life. The others, if others there are, who refuse to accept life in God's creation, will cease to have life (John 3.36). Here in Amos the implication is plain that the whole of mankind are to have the opportunity to *"earnestly seek"* God. Zephaniah says exactly the same thing; *"for then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord; to serve him with one consent"* (Zeph. 3.9). The same testimony is borne by the pen-pictures in both Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation. They describe a time when the river of life will flow from the sanctuary of God, bringing life to all that will. Trees of life will give food and healing for the nations, (Ezek. 47.12; Rev. 22.1,2). Whilst the Scriptures are positive that Christ and His Church, Christians of this present Age, will conduct and administer this work amongst mankind from the celestial sphere, they also indicate that there will be earthly representatives moving among men and relaying the laws of the Lord to all. *"Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"* says Isaiah; he goes on to indicate that there will be a wholehearted and enthusiastic response from the sons of men (Isaiah 2.3,4). This is the time when men *"shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks"* and the nations shall no longer go to war one with another.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows the seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it" (9.13).

Here is a picture of luxuriant fertility. The corn harvest shall be so plenteous that harvesting will still be in progress when the ploughman comes along to turn up the soil for next year's crops. The vines will yield so prolifically that men will still be gathering grapes when the sowers are going forth with next year's seed. This was the promise made to Israel at Sinai, if they kept the covenant and maintained their loyalty to God. *"Your threshing shall last to the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last to the time for sowing; and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land securely"* (Lev. 26.5). Israel failed to keep the

covenant and so the promise was not fulfilled. They, and all the world, will maintain loyalty to God and communion with Him in the blessed Age to come and so the promise will be realized, as Amos says here. The prophets foresaw, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the renovation and fertility of the restored earth. *"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose ... The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree ... The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and a little child shall lead them ... They shall build houses, and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble ... My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places ... And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever"* (Isaiah 11.6; 32.17-18; 35.1; 55.13; 65.21-23). This is only what one prophet, the far-seeing Isaiah, had to say about the exhilarating future that awaits humanity. Many of the other prophets supplemented his words and Jesus set the seal upon it all when He spoke of the days of "regeneration", of giving new life, which were to be characteristic of His Second Advent and Millennial reign over the nations (Matt. 19.28).

The mountains will drop sweet wine, says Amos. The vine-clad slopes would be so full of ripened grapes that it would be as though the luscious stream of unfermented juice – the meaning of the expression "sweet wine" – was literally pouring down the mountain-sides. All the hills shall melt; covered so plentifully with standing corn that as the wind rippled over it, the corn moved in waves as though the hills were literally melting. This is the picture of the abundance and prosperity of the future Age when evil is being progressively eliminated and the nations are turning to doing what is right and just.

"And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I

will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (9.14-15).

Amos was himself a child of Israel and it is only natural that he should come back at the last to his own people's place in this glorious sequel of events in the Divine purpose for mankind. Israel was inside God's plans for fifteen hundred years, from Moses to Christ, and for that period of time, was regarded, and as they regarded themselves, His chosen people, representing Him in the world and preserving His revelation to man. Disloyalty and idolatry and unbelief had cost them that favoured position. For two thousand years they have been on the sidelines, so to speak, whilst God executed His further purposes in and through the Christian Church. But this state of things is not to continue indefinitely. *"God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew"* wrote Paul in Rom. 11.2. Israel is to be restored when belief and faith on their part render such restoration possible. Amos sees here, the fulfilment of God's promise to restore His ancient people, in the same way that He will restore all mankind. So the ancient Holy Land will become a holy land in very truth and the ancient people of God become what they were always intended to be, missionaries to all nations, declaring the salvation of God and dispensing His blessings.

This was the constant theme of all the Hebrew prophets. They all perceived and foretold this day, after their people had learned their lessons the hard way. Zechariah was most eloquent *"I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts, ... my cities shall again overflow with prosperity"* (1.16,17). Ezekiel pictured the resurrection of a dead host into a living nation, never again to be uprooted or destroyed (Ezek. 37). Perhaps the finest presentation of this people's destiny is Isaiah 60 in its entire course outlining the future which awaits Israel. *"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you"* is his introduction. *"The nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising ... the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended ... the least one shall become a clan and the smallest one a mighty nation"*. That stirring chapter is preceded by a declaration that enshrines all that God will do in

the power of His Holy Spirit, by which all things are accomplished. *"My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, from henceforth and for ever"* (Isaiah 59.21).

This is the goal and at last the goal is attained. Amos, in his prophecy, traces a long sad history of Israel's apostasy and consequent judgement. He brings them through eventually into an "afterward of peace" when all the failures and shortcomings have been overcome and relegated to the past, and Israel is at last fully in communion with God, with no fear of ever returning to the bad old ways. That

in its entirety runs parallel with exactly the same process with all mankind. The same history of rebellion and sin, the same Redeemer and Saviour, the same utter destruction of man's world in consequence of his own folly, and the same deliverance at the end when God moves to save man from himself and show him the better way. The radiant future described by Amos, and not by Amos only, but all his fellow-prophets, and not by them only, but the Apostles and Jesus himself, is for all mankind "whosoever will" may, at the last, come and partake of the water of life freely.

The End

AOH

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

A Bible Study of Paul's letter to the Galatians

2. The Gospel of Grace

"So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." (Gal. 2.16 NIV)

At the beginning of his letter Paul rebuked the Christians of Galatia because they had listened to false teachers who infiltrated the church and who claimed to come from the original apostles in Judaea. They persuaded the new converts to Christ, that access to God was only available to those who kept the Law of Moses. Jesus brought the Good News that God could be approached by trust in Him for repentance and forgiveness of sins.

In some ways this was 'news' because the simple message of the prophets had been hidden by thousands of rules and regulations made by teachers of the Law. But the message was really new because Messiah had arrived. Angels took the glad tidings to shepherds on the hills around Bethlehem when the Son of God was born and laid in a manger. This theme was expanded by *"a voice of one calling in the desert"*, urging men and women to prepare for the Messiah by repenting from their sin. Jesus took up the refrain, telling the people of Israel that *"the kingdom of Heaven is at hand"*. Soon, men and women were being released from the consequences of sin to discover new life as they believed in Jesus. He taught in parables about God's forgiveness, in a way that it had never been taught before. His attitude demonstrated God's love as He healed folk from long-standing

diseases and freed them from the grip of evil spirits. A paralysed man, taken to Jesus by his friends, via a hole in the roof, heard that his sins were forgiven. A woman, whose life had in some way been immoral, was freed from the power of evil and she wanted to express her loving thanks to Jesus in the only way she knew. The self-righteous stance of the old men of the old order had kept people imprisoned in sin. At first they were disturbed and then angry at what He was doing and saying. Finally they were determined to kill Him and snuff out the light which was showing men the way to God.

Such was the Gospel of grace which the apostles inherited from their Lord. In Galatians 3, Paul showed that he preached no new message but led his readers back to Israel's roots. *"Look at Abraham: he put his faith in God and that faith was counted to him as righteousness"* (Gal. 3.6 REB). Moses stood before God on Sinai, not in the strength of a Levitical sacrifice but in the plea for God's compassion. When David composed the beautiful Psalm 51, he confessed his sin and threw himself upon the mercy of God. Israel's warrior king was deeply aware of his need of God's compassion and he wanted to bless the Lord for His forgiveness for wrong doing and His healing of physical weakness (Psalm 103.3).

The doctrine of justification by faith that Paul explains so clearly in his letters to the Galatians and to the Romans, must become a living principle

in the lives of God's people. If the repentant sinner goes to God, broken, helpless and trusting in His mercy, none need fear punishment however dreadful the sin. When we have experienced God's forgiveness, we are under obligation to express that same forgiveness towards all others. When Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving, unmerciful servant He showed how great and wonderful is the power of God's forgiveness. Any form of bitterness or resentment in our hearts, hinders us from receiving the Father's forgiveness, because it is so unlike the spirit in which His sunshine falls on the evil and the good. So Paul explained in theoretical detail what Jesus had expressed in every word and action in His life.

What do we mean by the word 'grace'? The popular definition is 'God's unmerited favour'. After saying that, a preacher was heard to exclaim, 'Are we not glad that we are God's favourites!' Now we have to ask is 'favouritism part of the meaning of grace?' Surely, grace is God's **unlimited** compassion on all that will receive it. In his lovely meditation on the life of David, 'Music on the Wind', Eddie Askew suggests "God's mercy lies in not giving us what we deserve. God's grace is giving us what we don't deserve."

Paul taught that because believers in Christ are justified by faith, we do not need to try to earn God's forgiveness and approval. Indeed we cannot. No matter how good we think we are or however clever we are at doing things for God, no effort we make can remove our sin and inability to please Him. Yet He, the Holy and Almighty One, who planned and caused to have made the whole universe and now provides the means to keep all things going, seeks our fellowship. The proud folk who think they are good, turn away from society's unwanted 'down-and-outs' but God our Father expresses His strong and everlasting love, in a way that will not allow us or anyone else ever to feel unwanted again.

He has done more, for in taking us for His children, He has given us through the power of His Holy Spirit, such abundance of gifts that we can never count them all. The believers in the churches of Galatia had known and felt much of this bounty after they turned to the Lord. God had demonstrated His great power and goodness among them in such a way that they should never have been mistaken. Yet mistaken they were and

this called forth Paul's strongest rebuke. It is similar to the words used by Jesus as he walked with two disciples on the Emmaus road. Foolish, senseless and unintelligent, are epithets that help us to catch the meaning of Paul's reproof of their illogical behaviour in Galatians 3.1. The work of the Holy Spirit among them demonstrated that they had access to God. They did not receive that access by their efforts to keep the Law but because they trusted in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Paul wrote in the manner of a Jewish teacher. Indeed, it was only proper in the circumstances that he should argue the doctrine of 'Justification by Faith' from the Scriptures. In this way he showed the readers of his letter that even Abraham, regarded by Jews as the most righteous man who had ever lived, was not made right before God because of his actions. His standing before God was not because he was sinless and totally morally upright. God accepted Abraham as His friend because a relationship of trust had grown up between them. It was a trust that allowed God to speak to Abraham of His purposes. It was a trusting relationship that gave Abraham confidence to plead for Lot and his companions in the cities of the plain. Out of that trust sprang an obedience that enabled the old patriarch to give to God the dearest thing in his heart. In spite of the occasional lapses there had been in that trust, God accepted the sacrifice, though sparing the life of the offered son, Isaac. Stephen reminds us that this friendship of faith whereby Abraham could stand in the presence of God, had started in a foreign land and before there had been a Mosaic Law.

Paul had no problem with the Law itself. His condemnation of the Galatians, and by inference of the Jewish teachers, was their attitude to the Law. Paul never tells Jews that they should no longer obey the Law. He does insist, however, that it is a wrong attitude to try to keep the Law to become 'self-justified'. Perhaps we should consider what Paul and the Jewish people thought of, as 'the Law'. Firstly, it was the Ten Commandments, that Moses received from God on Sinai and presented to Israel after his second descent from the mountain. The 'Law' could also embrace all the various sacrifices and rituals given in the Pentateuch. The real cause of the problem was that many regarded the multitude of interpretations and explanations by rabbis, as being 'the Law'. Such

is the problem of every 'religion'.

In the Gospels one of the most vital issues in keeping the Law is Sabbath observance. Wherever Jews opposed Paul's proclamation of the Gospel, they insisted that gentile converts to the Christian faith must be circumcised. They failed to realise that cleanliness of the heart from sin was more important than literal circumcision, as both Moses (Deut. 10.16) and Jeremiah (4.4) had shown. Paul also made it clear that the Law had a very real part in the purpose of God. Firstly, it had shown up sin for what it was. A line may not appear crooked until a ruler is placed beside it. Sinners would not have been aware of how much wrong they had done without a Law to demonstrate that they just couldn't keep it. Secondly, the Law was like a servant who led a child to school. The Law led Israel to Christ. It was God's means of preparing His people for Christ who would deliver them from sin. The Law was given for the interim period until Messiah came. When the social unit grew from the patriarchal family into a great nation, wrong doing was more difficult to control and detailed laws were needed.

All religious and moral systems seek to find a way by which people can establish their own righteousness. However well and frequently the spiritual and ethical structures seem to be built and rebuilt, men and women do not keep the rules. There is only one satisfactory way to approach the great Creator of the Universe, and that is by acknowledgement of our unworthiness before Him, our repentance from what we do wrong and then totally trust Him to put things right through Jesus Christ. This is the message of Galatians 2.16, *for individuals and for the whole of human society*. The reason why this is the successful way to please God lies in verse 20. We share the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The old life must

die and Christ changes us so that we have peace and victory over sin. Other humanitarian methods may tell us what is wrong but they are powerless to do much about it. If the believer will but submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, He alone has the power to transform us into His image. "Ah," says the critic, "but I see Christians doing and saying the wrong things everywhere". The believer needs no telling that he continually does that which displeases his Lord; he is all too aware of it. But provision has been made for that and is strongly stated in 1 John 1.7, for the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Unbelievers may not accept the historical evidence that Christianity has done what no system of religion or philosophy could in changing the world and individuals in it. They and many Christians do not know much about the inner life with Christ, the companionship and communion with Him. It is *this bond which brings justification and life with God* that is quite unimaginable to those who have never experienced it.

Bad though the Christian church's record may be, individually and collectively, there is a contrast to the remainder of mankind. The terms of faith in Jesus Christ whereby we can be saved through Him are recognition and surrender. Men and women must first recognise human inability to make any serious progress towards the ideal state of living without Him. The second step is unconditional surrender of self to the Saviour of the world. It is sad that the Church has failed to give a good witness or to set a better example, but in the end, even that failure will be seen to be part of God's reckoning. When a few lonely souls have trodden the way of Christ and trustingly reach their goal, *in the face of the bitterest opposition*, then they will be ready to go back to the 'others' and lead them home to God.

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KING ASA AND THE PROPHETS

*A Study of a good king
2 Chronicles 14-16*

King Asa was a good king; the best that Judah had known since the days of David his great-great-grandfather, whom he strongly resembled in so many ways. Like David, he combined a resolute and fervent faith in God with a pronounced flair for military strategy. To him God was a God of battles and would always fight for Israel while they maintained their faith in Him. As with David, too, he experienced the attentions of prophets who alternately praised and condemned him according to whether he acted in harmony with the expressed will of the Lord or against it. His reign had its shadows but in the main it was one of light. The kingdom of Judah knew more happiness under his rule than had been their lot since the early part of David's reign a century earlier.

Asa succeeded to a kingdom that had already lapsed from the high state of religious fervour and zeal it had known under King David. Then, the people held fast to the Divine promise that the throne of David would endure forever and Israel remain the channel of Divine blessing and enlightenment to mankind. That was three generations ago. Since then, Solomon, whose reign had commenced so auspiciously, had died leaving a land covered with the trappings of pagan worship. Under his son, Rehoboam in the south, and the rebel leader Jeroboam in the north, the situation had greatly worsened so that by the time Asa came to the throne there was apostasy from the faith inside the kingdom and enemies on the border waiting to invade. Asa was the first of the kings who tried to stem the tide.

His first move was to restore the worship of God and eliminate paganism. He knew that the enemies of the nation were poised to attack but he put first things first. He believed, and declared his belief, that if the nation put itself right with God then there would be Divine protection. So the historian records his initial achievement. *"Asa did that which was right and good in the eyes of the Lord his God. For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places and broke down the images, and cut down the groves; and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment"* (2 Chron. 14.2-4). This last phrase can only mean

that the observance of the covenant with attendant Passover celebration and the Day of Atonement sacrifices had fallen into disuse. It was going to be some time yet before all these things could be restored, but at least the king had made a start by removing the system of false worship that pervaded the land with, of course, their associated apostate priesthood. The presence of these was a powerful influence constantly drawing the people away from the standards of uprightness and leading them further into sin. Their true reconciliation to God through the covenant was to come as the next stage. This is a picture of mankind in this age and the next. Before the standards of righteousness can be set before men and the long process of reconciliation to God begin, Satan must be bound (Rev. 20.2) so that he may deceive the nations no more. All evil forces and powers in the world will be suppressed so that men may set out on their upward climb towards the heavenly city without that handicap.

Asa was a realist. He knew that he stood in imminent danger of attack by his enemies. His faith in God was strong, as strong as the faith of many Christians today, but he was a man of his times and his faith envisaged the power of his God exerted to the aid of his own strong right arm, which he must exert as a testimonial and demonstration of his faith. "Trust in God and keep your powder dry" is a modern sentiment that Asa also held although not in those precise terms. So, having done all that he could for the present in cleansing the nation from its moral defilement, he set about playing his own part, that he considered the Lord would expect him to play, in the defence of his country against its threatening invaders.

The Lord gave him a breathing space for ten years during which *"the land had rest"* (2 Chron. 14.6). That expression means that the reformation of the nation was sincere and some definite effort was being made to conform to the terms of the Covenant. Asa used those ten years to build fortified cities (we would call them frontier fortresses) and equip an army of half a million men and three hundred chariots.

Despite the enemy's overwhelming superiority in numbers, there is no doubt that these half million Israelites could have given a very good

account of themselves as they have done in similar circumstances in much more recent times. But in Asa's mind this half million was only an auxiliary defence, something material with which to face the enemy. His true defence was the Lord, and this he declared to his troops. *"Asa called to the Lord his God and said, There is none like you Lord, to help men, whether strong or weak. Help us Lord our God, for on you we rely and in your name we have come out against this horde. Lord you are our God; no mere mortal can vie with you"* (14.11).

How the Lord discomfited the invaders is not recorded; it is only said that He did, and that they fled, and Israel gathered much spoil. In the days of Samuel a similar exhibition of faith had brought about the enemy's defeat by means of a great hailstorm; two centuries after Asa the army of Sennacherib was decimated by a sudden pestilence. Probably here also the Ethiopian forces were routed by some unexpected phenomenon of Nature.

As the triumphant victors returned in jubilation to Jerusalem they were met by a prophet of God, Azariah the son of Oded (15.1). There was yet a century or more to run before the earliest of the prophets whose writings appear in the Old Testament came upon the scene, but previous to them there were men of like characteristics who proclaimed the true faith to an oft-times heedless people. This Azariah was one such. Like all of his fraternity, he claimed and exercised the right to stand before kings and pronounce praise or blame according to the king's faithfulness to God or the reverse. In this case it was to be praise. Coupled with the praise was the everlasting warning, for there was no respect of persons with the prophets any more than there was with God *"Hear me, Asa and all Benjamin. The Lord is with you when you are with him; if you seek him, he will let himself be found, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you"* (15.2). Israel, he went on to say, had been a long time without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without the Law of Moses. A pitiable descent indeed from the high hopes entertained two generations previously when Solomon had dedicated the splendid Temple he had built to the glory of God. Then all the people *"bowed themselves to the ground upon the pavement and worshipped and praised the Lord saying 'for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever'"* (2 Chron.

7.3). But, went on Azariah, *"when they in their trouble did turn unto the Lord God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them."* (15.3,4)

That seems to indicate that Asa had carried the people with him in his reforming zeal, and that the nation had returned to allegiance to God. Consequently there was a great upsurge of national feeling and a wholesale repudiation of false gods, culminating in a notable Feast of Pentecost at which the nation solemnly re-affirmed its acceptance of the Mosaic Covenant. It was a noteworthy day for Judah, one that they celebrated with shouting and trumpets and cornets. *"All Judah rejoiced at the oath, because they had bound themselves with all their heart and had sought the Lord earnestly; he had let himself be found by them, and he gave them security on every side"* (15.14,15).

For the next twenty years the nation enjoyed peace and prosperity. Time and time again is it exemplified in the history of Israel that when the national, no less than the individual life is guided by the principles of religious faith and respect for Divine law the result is an orderly, contented and prosperous society. Only when the disruptive factors of personal greed and social injustice are allowed to gain the upper hand does the community degenerate into a rabble of conflicting interests, leading eventually to anarchy. There lies the moral for today. As in the days of Solomon and Rehoboam, the attainment of a high level of material wealth and power has led to self-indulgence and selfishness. There is growing rejection of the self-discipline of religious faith on the part of an increasing number, leading more and more into anarchy, *"every man's hand against his neighbour"* as the prophet of old had it. It is to be feared that the present day world will not learn the lesson any more than did Israel, until, as He did with Israel, God allows the whole edifice of human society to crumble into ruins and then steps in to make a fresh start. He promised He would do that with Israel when they had ruined their own nationhood. The same promise applies to the rest of the world, and both promises will be redeemed together in the coming Messianic Age which is to succeed the dissolution of the present world system.

So the people of Judah had peace from the fifteenth year to the thirty-fifth year of Asa, the Temple, cleansed and re-dedicated, and adorned

with treasures of gold and silver so that it regained the magnificence it had enjoyed in the days of Solomon, again becoming the centre of the nation's worship.

However, in the thirty-sixth year there came a challenge from outside. Baasha, king of the northern ten-tribe nation, began making ominous moves on Judah's northern frontier. He evidently had plans to invade Judah. Not that there was cause for apprehension on that account. He had at most a few hundred thousand men. Twenty years earlier Asa had witnessed the overwhelming defeat of a million Ethiopians, hardy trained warriors, at the hand of the Lord, whilst all that Asa and his men had to do was to look on. One would think with that memory in mind Asa would exercise the same faith in face of this new menace and expect the same results. Inexplicably he did not.

To what extent he listened to the counsels of advisers who, softened by years of peace and prosperity, did not set the same store by faith in God as he had done twenty years previously, is not known. Whether he had become worldly-minded or less in tune with God during the passage of these years is likewise not known. Perhaps he had. Perhaps a lifetime as king over a prosperous people had measurably dimmed what we today would call his 'spiritual perception'. At any rate the high pinnacle of faith which he had so courageously mounted in those days of the Ethiopian invasion was not in evidence now. He did not, this time, go to God and say *"help us, Lord our God, for on you we rely and in your name we have come out, against this horde."* Instead he turned to more material means of defence. He stripped the Temple of its gold and silver treasure, which in theory, having been offered to God, were sacred to, and the property of, the Lord. He sent these to Ben-hadad, king of Syria as a bribe to induce him to launch an attack on the ten-tribes from the north and so draw them away from his own frontier. The ruse worked; the ten-tribe people found themselves attacked in the rear and abandoned their plans to invade Israel.

Why did he do it? Why this singular loss of faith when a precisely similar situation had been so easily and satisfactorily resolved by God in his previous experience. There is one factor that is not always taken into account. Unlike the Ethiopians, the ten-tribe nation was a part of Israel, God's

chosen people. Despite their present apostasy they were joint heirs with Judah of the Divine commission to be a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Did Asa cherish a secret fear that although God might readily oppose and defeat the alien Ethiopians, He would not so proceed against His own people of the ten-tribes? Was that the nagging apprehension which drove Asa to invoke an earthly power whom he knew could afford the necessary aid? If so, here is another instance of how the natural mind can go grievously astray in trying to apply human standards and human knowledge to the things of God. *"Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"* is and was then, a scriptural principle which Asa could and should have taken to himself and left the issue of this invasion threat to God as he had done before.

The king probably congratulated himself upon the outcome of his stratagem but not for long. He received a visit from another prophet, Hanani. This time he was not congratulated; the message Hanani brought him was decidedly unwelcome. *"Because you relied on the king of Syria and did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars"* (16.7-9).

True to the prediction, Asa had no further peace; wars and threats of wars with Syria, despite the bribe, filled the remaining six years of his reign. It was his own fault. He had despoiled the Temple of God to buy the help of a human ally who turned out in the end to be just another enemy. The golden years of his reign were brought to an end by his own act.

Hanani suffered for his candour. The king, in a rage, put him in prison and that is the last that is heard of Hanani. Asa suffered also. Two years before his death he became *"diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe"* but even in this he did not seek the Lord but had recourse to physicians. In that day and age this meant allying himself with the exponents of magic and dark arts, the only physicians of his time and nation. It does seem that despite his earlier stalwart faith, Asa did, regrettably end his life on a much lower level of

kinship with God. The early prophet commended him for his faith but the latter one condemned him.

It is a solemn thought that maybe material prosperity and a life of ease can constitute a more severe test of faith and constancy than one of adversity and suffering. The harder life develops the stronger character. But in the last analysis it is "*he that endureth to the end*" who is saved. Our Christian faith must survive not only the alternate periods of prosperity and adversity that may come our way but also the disintegrating influence of time. Instead of the goal becoming nearer and brighter as the years go by, to some it recedes and

shines more dimly. There are those whose love waxes cold before they reach the end of the way. Sometimes they wonder if, after all, God is so all-powerful or so actively interested in the welfare of His creatures, as they at first believed. Against all that come the stirring words of Hanani, spoken to king Asa on this historic occasion. Standing as an ever present reminder of our Lord's attitude toward each one of us; "*the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him.*"

AOH

THE LONG SEARCH

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God"

2. A Better Country

This is the second half of a treatise centred on the text "*Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come*" (Heb. 13.14) which considers man's quest for the eternal state. The first part spoke of the standards laid down by our Lord for those who would embark upon this pilgrimage.

The writer to the Hebrews had been reviewing the history of his own nation. Abraham, their revered father and founder had left the city of his youth to seek one founded upon better principles than that of Ur of the Chaldees, whose towering ziggurat testified to its pagan worship of the moon goddess. "*He looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*" He did not find such a city, but died, as he had lived, a tent dweller, confessing himself a pilgrim in the earth. His numerous descendants, who became a great nation, fared no better. Through many changes of circumstances they gained and lost a city whose name ranks above all other cities as the Holy City, the City of God. Yet over this same city the Son of God wept, foretelling its desolation, "*not one stone left upon another*". Well might the Hebrew letter-writer conclude on a note of pathos, "*Here we have no continuing city*". The words are no poetic flight of fancy. Every day death takes its tally. Young and old are carried off the stage, many to be quickly "forgotten as a dream". As with cities so with people. Every mournful procession tells the same story of "no continuing city". Yet such is the tenacity of heart and mind for an ideal life, even death cannot defeat hope or effort. Until men are at their wits end, they will

continue to strive, to seek and build what they think is the ideal state for the multitudes of mankind, only to have it dissolve in utter chaos when all seems secure.

"*That great city*" which the Revelator saw, clothed in the finest of royal linen and purple, is brought to nothing in one short hour. This city for which the merchants of the earth mourn, whatever its dimensions or its place among men, is no more enduring than any of its predecessors. Before Christ there was no continuing city as one by one the gold, the silver and the brass, which represented the wealth and power of early kingdoms were pushed from the scene, nor has any city or kingdom continued since. The nations of Christendom have neither reformed nor converted the world to His teachings. Their career has been stained and marred by much that is cruel, oppressive, bigoted, misguided and biased.

Jesus knew that most of His teaching would be lost sight of, in the general life of the world. "*My kingdom is not of this world.*" Yet He urged His disciples to seek it, to understand its principles and to practise them in an alien world, as prospective citizens of that city which Abraham sought, whose builder and maker is God. The search for that visionary city has been the longest, the most ardent, the most courageous which the heart and mind of man has ever undertaken. He has given to it time and attention, even the whole of life, counting it a light thing to give for such an eternal weight of glory. Although here in the existing order of things "*we have no continuing city*", the men of faith state

with assurance *"we seek one to come."* The long search has never been abandoned nor will it be until the gates are opened wide and all who will may enter in. Abraham received nothing of the Promised Land, nor did he see one foundation stone of the city he sought. What he did see down the centuries was the coming of one of his race that would take the title "Son of Man" and receive among many other illustrious names that of the "Son of God". *"Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad"* (John 8.56). Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God. He taught people to pray for its establishment in the words *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven"*. He said nothing about man's going to heaven, the dwelling place of God, but of God's rule being done on the earth to its ultimate peace and well-being. A kingdom implies a city and a city implies rule. The rule of the city of God implies a system of law and order to which the cities of this world have long been strangers. That there is such a city John emphatically declared *"And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven"* (Rev. 21.2).

This is not man going to heaven, a place of holiness and purity of spirit, for which he is obviously not fitted, but God coming to earth, setting up His own city, a government which will wipe away all tears, in that it will remove all causes for tears. This city of God, this New Jerusalem, has been long planned, long in preparing, as its ideals, proportions and solid foundations have been long sought. Paul writing to the Galatians identified it as *"Jerusalem which is above is free which is the mother of us all"*. (Gal. 4.26). This bearer of life to all does not remain above but comes down to function as a city, a form of government different and better than all that has gone before it.

No one reading the history of the past or the newspapers of today could honestly claim that any generation has produced ideal government in which all its citizens are happy, healthy and satisfied. Evils have abounded in every land in every decade. The modern world is beset by problems it cannot solve, by perils that fill it with fear, by dangers and violence which constantly shock by their horrifying consequences, by their deep hatred and savage ferocity.

What frightens most is not the explosive power

of bombs kept in store by the nations but the explosive power of human selfishness, the clash of human personalities. "Egoism" says one of the sick world's doctors, "is the intrusion of this cold conceit into public life. It causes more than half the world's mischief. It brings disaster from the angry gods." The real problem is in the hearts and minds of men. Professor Einstein concluded "that it was easier to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man".

In the face of the failures and ruins of the past, and the deadly perils of the present which threaten the very existence of the planet and all its occupants, the search for security, for life in a continuing city seems to be fruitless. The advice of Jesus to "seek first the kingdom of heaven" seems a vain quest. Scientific knowledge and fertility of invention are not enough. Indeed they would seem to be the foes of human peace rather than the guardians of the most precious qualities of life. From every quarter of the globe the agencies of news and information reveal creation groaning under its load of pain, and utter confusion. The terrible image seen by the prophet Daniel bestriding the earth like a gigantic colossus, was intended to portray the civilisations of men deteriorating from the head of gold to the feet of iron and clay upon which the huge systems stand vulnerable and divided. However loudly the worldly wise may cry for the universal brotherhood of man, there is no adhesion in the unruly masses. Unstable and tossed about like water, restless like a great sea whose waves rise higher and higher, some crying one thing and some another, the world and its peoples desire a haven, a city of peace. They are as much in need of the kingdom of heaven as those to whom Jesus came preaching its wisdom and justice. The house built upon sand and the clay in the feet of the great image, are pictures of danger to structures which have no solid foundations. The only solid foundation to any life, personal, national or spiritual is that based on the just principles laid down by God. Abraham knew what he was looking for and he was prepared to wait for the eternal city which John saw with its gem studded foundations, its streets of gold and gates of pearl (Rev. 21.16-21). These are all vivid symbols of the kind of government to which the nations of the earth will eventually pay tribute.

The four-square basis of this city of God upon its super foundations is a vision of government without party, class, caste, creed or colour. It is government for the human race without venom or partiality, founded upon justice and judgement. *"Justice and judgement are the habitation of thy throne. Mercy and truth shall go before thy face"* (Psalm 89.14). The first requirement of God is justice. Perhaps no quality has been so much abused or allowed to degenerate into weakness as this sterling virtue. *"Judgement will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet."* These are the very muscles and strength of the action of God's kingdom demonstrating His justice to man and His just requirements from man. *"To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God"* are the first essentials.

There have been many cheap jibes about the pearly gates, those entrances of translucent beauty through which all law-abiding citizens pass into the kingdom of God. They are not gates of death but gates of life. Nor will Peter be found standing there inspecting either the persons or the passports of any who wish to walk the street of gold. There is a shining transparency about that city which reflects with more than mirror clarity all who draw near to it, who gaze upon its walls, its streets or its iridescent portals. As none can deceive God who reads the heart and is no respecter of persons, so at those pearly gates none will be able to deceive themselves. The self they will see reflected at the threshold will be their true self, not the one they have fondly imagined themselves to be, nor the one they have projected for others to see. It will be the real being, stripped of all pretences of heart, mind, motives, will and desire. The whole nature will be fully revealed with varying degrees of astonishment for all to see themselves as they truly are. Jesus was never deceived by the words or outward appearance of the people about Him. John says *"he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man for he himself knew what was in man"* (John 2.25). He looked on them and saw through them to the very core and centre of their being. When Paul warned that all must *"stand before the judgement seat of Christ"* he was not visualising a long judicial inquiry covering a lifetime's deeds. The sum total of words and actions first originating in thought make everyone what they are. One look is enough for both judge

and judged.

Sin cannot stand in His presence. Whatever the form of its uncleanness it must shrink back, appalled before the gaze of purity expressed and symbolised by the jasper walls and the pearly gates which will not admit *"the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars"* (Rev. 21.8). Unless such become reformed and transformed, separated from their sins, to become the children of God, they will never pass into that kingdom with all its life-giving blessings. It is the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, those who walk humbly with God who will walk in His kingdom, citizens of His eternal city, that abiding one for which Abraham sought. It is the righteous who will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The Holy City, its Founder and its people will be all of a piece, part of the one great pattern of justice, wisdom and love. Man in his present state is described as *"crooked and perverse"*, the blinded victim of evil forces beyond his control. At best, human nature is subject to change, to error, doubt, ignorance and partiality, which defeat the best intentions and thwart the finest endeavours. With God the Father, there is *"no variableness, neither shadow of turning"*. (James 1.17). He is what He has always been in ages past, what He will always be in ages to come, of one mind and one purpose; not one thing today and another tomorrow. What He has promised He will perform and it is this immutability which is the rock-foundation of the city of which He is the architect; its builder and maker.

This is the strong hope that pulls life's pilgrims on to the end of their search, a long search as man counts time but a brief interlude in eternity in God's reckoning. When *"the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ"* and His sovereignty is complete for all time to come, the dark night of death and defeat will fade from memory. When what now appears to the sceptical as fantasy becomes an accomplished fact, there will be a new awareness of life and righteousness. There will be a new desire to be in tune with God, to be as it were on the same wavelength and to say *"Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, ... he will teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths"* (Micah 4.2).

The prophets of God were privileged to write

history beforehand. They told of the decline and fall of many nations but they also told of the irresistible purpose of God, going forward regardless of the failures of the race and of the world. He followed the interests of His people and worked for them *"according to the counsel of his own will"* with unswerving decision and unflagging patience. They saw beyond the ruins of transitory kingdoms and fallen cities to a triumphant conquest and the City of God with its rule of justice and peace under which the swords of war will be beaten into ploughshares and pruning hooks, of domestic bliss and rural beauty, *"for all people will walk everyone in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever"*.

It must be plain to all that this kingdom will never be established by missionary zeal or by the charitable actions of benevolent philanthropy. Christianity is a shrinking force in a vast ocean of 'isms' that bear no relation to the kingdom of God. Evils increase in strength and kind. Men's pleas are for more soldiers, more weapons, more police, more prisons, more asylums and bigger hospitals.

"He gave ... Apostles ... Prophets ... evangelists ... pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ..." (Eph. 4.11)

Every now and again someone comes along with an eulogy on the merits of eschewing all human aids to faith and belief, and relying entirely upon personal reading and interpretation of the Bible. Once we were immature children, spoon-fed with the theological notions and definitions of faith of older men (or long-since-dead members of a past generation who only partially understood the Christian faith. Now we have our eyes opened and we can interpret the Scriptures to ourselves without any human help and we are all the better for it. That is the presumption and the elderly believers who ought to know better and the naive youngsters who cannot be expected to know much better would alike be greatly disturbed to be told that their attitude is spiritual egotism of a high order. But so it is. The Christian who thinks that he can complete his growth in grace and knowledge without any assistance from the instruments the Lord has placed in the Church for that purpose is repudiating the arrangement whereby Christ ordained that His Church should grow. The right of private judgment, of deciding for oneself the extent to which things we see and hear and read do correctly represent the Word of the Lord to us, is one that we do well to maintain and guard jealously. That is our privilege

There are few prayers or desires for more of God and goodness in human affairs. Divine interference would be unwelcome in most quarters, especially by those who mock God and despise virtue. The world is not convertible; nor would it, if it had the chance, vote for the rule of the Kingdom. In due time the earth will be taken over by Him whose right it is to rule. *"And the government shall be upon his shoulder"*. Among His many titles, Lord of lords and King of kings, He is also called *"Wonderful Counsellor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end"* (Isa. 9.6-7). Ordered and established in justice and judgement by the irresistible spirit of God it will endure forever.

Then shall all shackles fall; the stormy clangour
Of wild war-music o'er the earth shall cease
Love shall tread out the baleful fires of anger
And in their ashes plant the tree of Peace.

(J. G. Whittier)

The End

FAS

and prerogative. But our claim that our own ability to sense the Divine mysteries is so pronounced that we need no assistance from the ministers God has appointed for that purpose is one that has no endorsement in either the teachings of Jesus or the writings of the Apostles.

It is a truism, endorsed by Paul, that no man lives to himself. That holds good in our spiritual lives particularly. The whole body can only *"be fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth"*. The labours and writings of men long since gone to their rest, the ministry of those now living and moving amongst us contribute in a myriad of ways to our own growth in the things of the Spirit. So also do the devotional thoughts and intellectual insight of zealous disciples known and unknown to us. The believer who refuses to avail himself of these things and deliberately confines himself to the circle of his own interpretation of the Authorised Version is rejecting the accumulated experience of all God's saints through the Age provided by the Good Shepherd for his benefit. This is so whether he knows it or not.

It may sound very fine and large to say "I study the Bible for myself; I don't accept the opinions of any man", but it is really rather petty and very silly. It does not betoken maturity of Christian character but rather the reverse. One element of true humility lies in the willingness to learn from others.

THE SAVING POWER OF GOD

*A study of the
work of Christ*

5. Steps along the way

Through the ages countless men and women have sought to find God. Somewhere behind the wonderful creation that we observe and enjoy, there must be One who designs and executes His plans. That is the logic of those who search, yet in spite of philosophies devised by the human mind, those who refuse to travel by God's way seek in vain. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14.6 NIV). There is something very much like that in the letter to the Hebrews. *"... the blood of Jesus makes us free to enter the sanctuary with confidence by the new and living way which he has opened for us through the curtain, the way of his flesh."* (Heb. 10.19,20 REB). It is the goal of our longings, to enter the presence of God, so that we may see Him and enjoy His fellowship, but that requires a journey and sometimes it's a long one. In any event, however long or short that journey may be, there are logical steps that must be taken. Some believe that this all happens at once; others may wonder why it does not. However the New Testament clearly describes various aspects of that journey and it was largely Paul who laid down the definitions and explanations.

Already in this study it has been necessary to see the need to recognise sin and be genuinely sorry that it has occurred but that is not enough. Sin is making a move in the wrong direction on the journey through life. Repentance is when the sinner turns and travels towards God. John the Baptist preached *"a baptism of repentance and the forgiveness of sins"* (Luke 3.3) and this would be familiar to those who heard him for Psalm 32.1 (RSV) reads *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered"*. The word that the Baptist used, *'aphesis'* translated from the Greek as forgiveness, represents the idea of 'sending away or loosing' but perhaps even more appropriately can be associated with the removal of barriers. With sin and God's wrath behind us we are ready to accept His means of bringing about full restoration. The emphasis must always be upon the fact that the whole process of atonement is initiated by God, for it is all part of His purpose. This helps us to understand the meaning of Revelation 13.8 which speaks of the Lamb that was

slain, with reference to the foundation of the world. Thus John announced the *"Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"*. The way by which sin was removed was discussed earlier in this study but it now seems appropriate to look at the concept again briefly. One of the most important Greek words in this respect is *'hilasterion'*, yet it only occurs twice in the New Testament. In Romans 3.25 in the AV and RV it is translated *'propitiation'* but in the NIV and New RSV it is translated *'a sacrifice of atonement'*. The other occurrence is Hebrews 9.5 and again there has been a change from the older translation of *'mercy seat'* to *'the place of atonement'* or *'expiation'* in the more recent translations. The verbal form of the word occurs in 1 John 2.2 and 4.10 and the same kind of change is again made in the modern translations. These changes may reflect the modified meanings of words over three centuries but they also indicate a more hesitant attitude in expressing the thought that God needs to be appeased. The idea of *'legal substitution'* conveys something of the way in which God cancels sin but it does not reveal all that God has done in Christ.

The same applies to the word *'lutron'* translated *'ransom'* meaning to 'loose'. This is an echo of the Old Testament thought concerning a kinsman redeemer as in the story of Boaz and Ruth. It also refers to the ancient custom of buying back those who were captive in war or had been sold as a slave. Israel's release from Egypt was thought of as God's redemption of His people (1 Chron. 17. 21), and there are many references to Him being their redeemer from various forms of trouble. The theme was developed through the prophets so that when New Testament writers used it, the idea was familiar to the early disciples. There is only one recorded incident in which Jesus used this expression and that was His rebuke to the disciples about ambition when the question was asked about James and John sitting either side of Him in His Kingdom (Matt. 20.28; Mark 10.45). On that occasion He spoke of the Son of Man giving Himself a ransom *"for the many"* in the context of *"a servant"*. This has distinct overtones from the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah 53. In 1 Timothy 2.6 Paul uses the word *'antilutron'* and

this word for ransom carries the thought of a substitutional ransom, and that for **all**. In modern literature Dickens has left us an unusual example of this idea in his novel 'Tale of Two Cities' where Carton goes to the guillotine in place of Darnay. What is particularly important in the use of these words by Jesus and Paul, is the application to the whole of mankind and not just to one or a few. There is a corporate sense in which Christ died for the whole world. There is an individual sense in which every believer can say "Jesus, my Lord and Saviour died for me." This is the claim of Paul in Romans 7.24,25. Another very valuable testimony to Christ's redeeming work is by Peter in 1 Peter 1.18,19 *"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake"* (NIV). This and all those ideas which surround the concepts of redemption and ransom are beautiful ways of describing the work of Christ but they only describe aspects of that work and no one picture can in itself describe every aspect. Nor may we take any of these illustrations too far (as is sometime done with parables). If we do, we may find ourselves asking questions such as 'to whom was the ransom paid?' The important principle is that we have someone to stand in our place, to take what we deserve and yet can give us resurrection life after He has taken our place in death.

Justification by Faith

At this point, Paul's words in Romans 4.25 are applicable, *"He was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification"*, so we must first look at the important teaching of Romans 4. There, Paul deals with Justification by Faith. It is a doctrine that is important and unique to the Christian Church. All religions and philosophies of men, including Judaism, require that each of us shall attempt to achieve a right standing before God by our own efforts That is what Paul calls 'Justification by works' (Gal. 3.20) So how does 'Justification by faith' operate?

The words from which justify and justification are translated in both Old and New Testament mean "to be brought into a right relation with God," writes Dr. Snaith who goes on to affirm that

"justification is the first step in the process of salvation". It is the immediate 'setting right with God' that can only be achieved by Him and not by the sinner. There is nothing in the Old Testament to suggest that the sinner can be justified by keeping the Law (see Job 25.4, Psalm 143.2). The Greek word *dikaioo* does not mean 'to make just' but conveys the idea of providing a 'right standing before God'. It is a theological word not an ethical one. Misunderstanding in this respect seems to be the root cause of failure in some ethical judgments. Justification by faith is not an ethical fiction. God does not transfer righteousness from one person to another. The key scriptures for this teaching are Genesis 15.6; Romans 4.3 and Galatians 3.6. *"Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."* On the Greek word *dikaioo* from which righteousness is translated, Grimm-Thayers says that God "declares such men as put their faith in Christ to be righteous and acceptable to Him". They are counted as righteous because they trust that in Christ they will ultimately stand before God's judgment seat without blemish. They do so, not because of any goodness of their own but by what God has done for them in the sinless life and death of Christ. The same thought is expressed in Isaiah 53.1 *"by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous."* From the legal point of view it may seem a paradox because a holy God should execute a just punishment for sin. Yet it is God himself who through love offers the means of acquittal. In being justified by faith the sinner resolves to turn towards God through the redemptive work which gives him life and provides acceptance to God. The most telling thing about Paul's discussion in Galatians 2 is his exclamation on the work of salvation. *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* This cannot be just a matter of intellectual understanding or acceptance but a living union with Christ that affects every breath and movement of our lives. Trying to understand every feature of these doctrines may be difficult. Paul evidently thought that it was necessary to discuss them and he gives clear, logical reasons for accepting them. But technical jargon cannot replace the life of faith. Daily living

with Christ is what really matters and is within the range of every believer. Living 'in Christ' and walking with Him daily is the essential matter and when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and we are genuinely sorry, the Lord forgives.

Reconciliation

The object of Atonement is to bring about a full restoration of fellowship between God and man. This is necessary because man rebelled and sin became an obstacle to fellowship. In the New Testament sin is shown to have caused enmity on the human side which needs to be eliminated. If man is at war with God then there is a need for peace to be restored. It is as if a canyon has opened up between man and his Maker and there is a need for a bridge to be built across the chasm. These are but pictures, trying to suggest what happened when Adam disobeyed God and plunged himself and all his descendants into a situation out of which they could not get themselves.

Reconciliation is translated from the Greek word 'katallasso'. Its basic meaning is 'change' or 'exchange' referring to money or persons. Only Paul uses this word in the New Testament and the idea is mainly that mankind needs to change and not God. So the idea of change represents transformation of someone from an enemy into a friend. An example of this in Romans 5.10 where Paul writes, *"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled through the death of His Son, how much more now that we have been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life"*. The same thought is mentioned again in Romans 8.7 where he says that the sinful mind cannot please God. Although God is hostile to sin, he is not hostile to the sinner. However much God is willing to forgive the sinner and however often he does so, he cannot excuse the sin because man is now in a condition where he cannot do what is right. Nevertheless it cannot be said too often that it is God who initiates reconciliation and Moffatt's translation of 2 Cor. 5.19 is accurate and helpful, *"For in Christ, God reconciled the world to himself"*. The great and almighty Creator has removed the obstacles, has bridged the canyon and brought peace to the warring party.

The modern media presents to us the gulf that exists between various factions of mankind. This is because mankind, having tried to make war against God follows it up with war within itself.

The arrogance, aggression and intolerance within people result in division and strife. So after God has brought about peace with man, He then begins to heal the opposing factions with the race and beyond. In Ephesians 2 Paul describes how this has been done between Jew and Gentile. Israel was at least nominally at peace with God. His ancient people through the giving of the Law and through the making of the covenant could have, when they drew near to God, peace with Him and peace in every aspect of life. They did not often value the privilege. But now because God's people, Jew and Gentile, were in union with Christ Jesus and had been brought into union with God, there could no longer be hostility between people of different ethnic backgrounds. This must hold true within the whole church; there can be no division on account of nation or race. The great healing process must follow in every aspect of life and this is so graphically described in Galatians 3.26-28. *"It is through faith that you are all sons of God in union with Christ Jesus. Baptized into union with him, you have all put on Christ like a garment. There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female, for you are all one person in Christ Jesus."* Three times in those three verses, the Apostle says that it all happens because of our union with Christ. That is the key to being 'at one with God' and not because we are able to argue all the minute details of what is often wrongly called doctrine but really is the interpretation of small aspects of doctrine. Being 'in Christ' is what is written large across the New Testament and what will eventually decide where we are going to spend eternity. It is being in Him that brings about the necessary change in us that demonstrates that we are reconciled to God. From then on there can be no division between brothers and sisters in Christ. To the extent that we break our relationship with them, we break it with our Father and with our Lord.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul takes this subject one step further. The problem of Genesis is solved. Rebellion by mankind against their ever loving Creator brought rebellion to the creation of which man had been made steward. Ever since then, history has shown just how much the natural world is in conflict with itself and with the human race. Disease and pestilence, disasters and wars, every possible thing that has prevented mankind

and nature from enjoying peace and harmony, has resulted from human disobedience. Much of which is claimed as human invention and progress is a continuance of the same story. That said Paul is going to be put right, as he shows so succinctly yet strongly in Colossians 1.19,20. *"For in him God in all his fullness chose to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross – all things whether in earth or heaven."* If we allow the imagination to dwell on those thoughts for a moment, we shall see what a fantastic thing happened on Calvary. Have you ever wandered down a garden path and wondered about green fly? Have you crept softly through a hospital ward and wondered about children dying? That said Paul is going to be put right. God is often blamed but He gave of His dearest and best to put right that in

which we have done wrong. Nor should we blame other human beings. God is more concerned with the patient outworking of a scheme that will demonstrate His unutterable love. We can begin to enjoy something of that scheme in our lives now if the intensity of our desire for His friendship is strong enough.

I've found a friend, O! such a friend
He loved me ere I knew Him;
He drew me with the cords of love,
And thus He bound me to Him.

And round my heart more closely twine
Those ties which naught can sever
For I am His and He is mine,
For ever and for ever.

James Grindley Small
DN

THE EXODUS

6. Preparing for Action

*A series intended to
help younger readers
discover the Bible*

Moses probably went from Mount Horeb back to the tent of his father-in-law, Jethro, to tell him of the task which God had given to him. There would be no more hesitancy. He had left behind the reluctance to do God's will. Now he would move forward for the rest of his life, fulfilling the dream of his young days. He went back a different person. Before in Egypt he had trusted in his own strength and that attitude had betrayed him into hasty action that destroyed his hope of delivering his people. The impetuous, impatient visionary had given place to a person of sound judgment and unhurried maturity. Once he had fled for his life but now he would stand as a rock against which the present Pharaoh would at last fall and be broken.

Perhaps Jethro was not surprised at his son-in-law's request. The few references to this Midianite priest shows that he was a man of mature wisdom. A descendant of Abraham he worshipped the God of his forefather. He may have known of the promise that in the fourth generation the children of Jacob would return to Canaan. Recognising that God had revealed Himself to Moses, he gave the younger man his blessing and sent him away.

The journey to Egypt has a rather strange story of the circumcision of Gershom, Moses' firstborn.

It is possible that Eliezer, the younger lad was born several months later and that after the incident in Exodus 4, Zipporah returned to her father until the whole nation of Israel reached Horeb. Thus she could await the birth of their second child without the arduous 200 mile journey, twice. Before they parted, they encamped for the night and Zipporah noted that Moses was ill. She concluded that this occurred because of their failure to circumcise Gershom and promptly performed the operation. The custom was not new to her and was practised among her own people. The AV conveys a sense of her disgust but that is not the real meaning of her comment "You are my blood-bridegroom". She probably meant that Moses was now tied even more intimately by blood, and she was expressing their mutual trust until they should be reunited. Zipporah did not have far to retrace her steps to her old home for almost immediately Moses met Aaron 'in the mount of God'.

The older brother from Egypt would have travelled a well worn road for it was the route to the Egyptian copper mines. Caravans of traders with camels and Egyptian officials would undoubtedly have passed the Hebrew leader. Aaron might even have been along that road to visit Moses during the forty years exile. Now they were going back to

Egypt together. At last Moses arrived and was among the elders of Israel and these were the men he must convince before he took his claims to all Israel and then to Pharaoh's court. There were twelve princes in Israel who were heads of the tribes. Seventy elders were next in the hierarchy of Israel. These leaders were apparently convinced by Aaron's eloquence, of God's authority through Moses recorded in the words of Exodus "*When they heard that the Lord had shown his concern for the Israelites and seen their misery, they bowed to the ground in worship*" (4.31 REB).

There could only have been a representative gathering of the people of Israel at this time for they numbered several millions. Moses could hardly have made himself known personally to them all. The news would travel swiftly from village to village throughout the land of Goshen and from street to street in the suburbs of Tanis. There would be a sufficient number scattered among the people who knew and believed in the age-old Divine promise of deliverance, to hail this as its fulfilment. The general excitement must have been something like the messianic expectations that gripped their descendants just before the First Advent of Christ. The long promised deliverer was present and had been seen by some. His words would be repeated from mouth to mouth. The power of Egypt would be broken and the faithful of the Lord led across the desert to a new and better land. There is not much doubt that the brick making output fell off and small wonder that the Egyptian taskmasters were annoyed.

In spite of the serfdom imposed upon them, the Israelites still had time to devote to their own affairs. They had flocks and herds that they insisted on taking with them. Clearly, Goshen was a land of farms and homesteads, perhaps interspersed with brick-fields. Most Israelites would grow their own crops and tend their own cattle between terms of service for public building works. In spite of unremitting toil there seems to have been opportunity to organise some kind of national life. When Moses returned from Midian he found, not a rabble of unorganised slaves but a close knit community with ties of kinship, faith and above all hope for the future. It is doubtful if Moses would ever have persuaded Israel to move on the basis of misery and oppression only. There must have been something of that passionate

desire for a land of their own which characterises their modern descendants and has made the creation of the modern State of Israel a reality. They followed Moses because, for the moment at least, the entire people believed that the promise to Abraham "*in the fourth generation they shall come hither again*" was about to be fulfilled. Moses and Aaron then spent a lot of time spreading the news about their mission. It was important that the people knew what was going on. Three million people would not march out of Egypt with all their animals and belongings merely by blowing a trumpet. Goshen was an area as big as that part of England south of a line drawn from the Thames to the Bristol Channel which meant a lot of travelling for the elders as they consulted with village headmen and other people with some sort of special task or authority. The bare, unemotional statement in Exodus 12.41 "*at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the host of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt*" gives no indication of the tremendous work that was involved in getting this whole mass of people on the move. Eventually Moses and Aaron would be satisfied that the people had a reasonably clear idea of what was expected of them and a network of communication and command was established. There were probably some hotheads who wanted to move immediately and some of the population might be moving towards the border. Egyptian officials must have found their task of overseeing the brick making increasingly difficult as the day of departure drew near.

Such a state of affairs would not be lost on the royal court so that when at last Moses and Aaron appeared requesting an audience with Pharaoh there must have been a lively interest as to the possible outcome. Armen-hotep II generally regarded as the Pharaoh of the Exodus had ruled for seven years and was still comparatively young. He was tall, handsome, arrogant and cruel. He had fought ruthless campaigns against Syria and Sudan. He personally killed seven kings after they had been taken prisoner and was responsible for other acts of barbarism. An inscription on his bow found in his tomb is in very boastful language and matches the Exodus record of what he said to Moses (5.2) "*Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.*"

Moses and Aaron had gone to demand their people's freedom as told in chapter 5. If Israel's God was 'the Eternal, the Mighty', then he, Pharaoh, would tolerate no rival. He probably didn't know Moses and may not have been born when Moses went to Midian. Pharaoh addressed them personally, "*Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get to your burdens.*" The two great leaders were ushered out of the court amid laughter and jeers. They were apparently not regarded as so dangerous as to need arrest or restraint. The people of Israel suffered because Pharaoh regarded them as idle and in need of more work and so he commanded that they should find their own straw to mix with the wet clay, but still make the same number of bricks. There is evidence of the truth of this narrative. The ruined walls of the city of Rameses are still there, and it was on this city that the Israelites laboured. The bricks, still in position in the lower courses, were made with a mixture of straw. The middle layer has an admixture of grasses and stubble while the upper courses have no binding material at all. In the circumstances the people were unable to make their daily quota, for which their Israelite supervisors were punished. They appealed to Pharaoh who scornfully rejected them. So they turned on Moses and Aaron who could only cry to the Lord for help, "*Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? And why did you ever send me?*" and the reply from the Lord came "*Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh: he will be compelled to let them go, he will be forced to drive*

them from his country" (Exodus 5.22-6.1).

The pace of the Exodus record now quickens. The first interview with Pharaoh had resulted in a worsening of Israel's condition. Moses was naturally puzzled and discouraged. His reputation among his own people was at a low ebb. It was almost as if Pharaoh had been given an opportunity to release the slaves without loss of dignity. Now God promised to intervene. What may have seemed a long drawn out ordeal for Moses is perhaps easier for us to understand. The Israelites had much to learn. This deliverance and the events that were to follow it were designed in the Divine providence to instil the conviction into the people concerning God's purpose and their place in it. This was not just a simple rescue operation after which they could be left to their own devices. They were being brought into the service of another Master to become a people, shaped and developed for his particular work in saving all mankind. This was a drama much larger than Egypt's frontier. They were not being saved just from an evil monarch but from evil itself so that they could become God's missionaries to declare His salvation to the ends of the Earth. Therefore the process of their deliverance from Egypt was by successive stages in which they must begin to understand the issues involved. That would not occur by a simple rescue operation but by seeing the mighty hand of God at work among them.

(To be continued)

AOH/DN

The truths revealed in the life and teachings of Christ are of sovereign power, and are the most influential upon motives and the conduct of human life. They go to the very root of moral consciousness. They reveal human character by applying to it a standard higher than any that was ever before applied to it. They define and mark the nature of sin in human conduct. They establish obligations upon immutable grounds leaving them not to the shifting ingenuity of human reason, but imposing them according to Divine principles. They reveal the infinite reach of moral conduct and its eternal consequences. Thus they reveal to man the nature of himself, the nature of the government under which he lives, the nature of God, and the nature of immortality.

H. W. Beecher, 1813-1887

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF GIFTS

In order to minimise costs, acknowledgements of gifts are sometimes sent with the next issue of the BSM. Clearance of cheques from overseas is sometimes slow, so readers should not be alarmed if their gift does not appear on their bank statement for several months. We do not cancel the BSM for regular readers because a renewal form has not been received. We are aware that some of our readers, through age and illness have difficulty in writing to us.

Questions are the sign of a lively mind, of mental watchfulness. But it is not enough for our minds to be awake – our hearts too must be open, our consciences alive.

TO LIVE OR TO DIE

An exhortation to trust

"None of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, if we die, we die to the Lord; so then whether we live or die we are the Lord's." (Romans 14.8). In moments of high courage, when fired by a noble purpose, fearless men have been known to say "It is not necessary that I should live, but if I do, life can have but one object for me". It is no light thing to say, nor is it an easy attitude to have reached. Most men on sober reflection would agree that the world would still go on without them, but few sit down to face that uninviting situation. Most people lack courage on the question of 'passing out' from the known to the unknown. They face the last issue with something of the resignation of fatalism, because they must. Even Christian people, long buoyed up by expectations of winging their flight to 'a better land' at death, fight shy of the moment of departure. The doctor is expected to do his utmost to put off that farewell moment as long as possible, and many thanks are extended to him if he is successful in winning a respite for the one about to depart. Those unhappy folk who "pass out" by their own hand are generally considered to be "of unsound mind", not able to weigh properly the blessings of life against the dark uncertainties that lie ahead. Such unhappy souls are counted exceptions, beaten down by contrary forces till they find no desire in life. Not only would the majority of men not "pass out" in that way; but could they really have their choice, they would not "pass out" at all. There is nothing censurable in this attitude. Man was made to live originally, and had he not sinned, he would not have had to die. The entrance of sin did not destroy the desire to live, and except where adversity or unremitting pain rob existence of all its joys, the desire still persists. It is the enforcement of God's penalty against sin that makes death, thus far, inevitable. The "needs be" comes from God not from man.

It is not fair nor reasonable to judge this question from the standpoint of war-fevered days. This is when mass-madness prevails. With fearful things looming ominously near, thousands – perhaps millions might say it would be better to be dead than alive. A change in political climate and the balance of their judgment would quickly be restored. The attitude of man in every land could

be summed up in one short phrase, 'man wants to live as long as he can, and will face up to death, only when he must'.

This attitude of most people makes the attitude of the exceptions only the more remarkable. When such exceptions are still blessed with health and strength and unworn by adversity or pain it is very rare indeed. Such look out dispassionately on life and death, and say "It is not necessary for me to live, but if I do, life can have but one object for me". It is absolutely certain that such a person is consecrated to the noblest things he knows. The 'object' is greater than his life. It is so great, that life can be spent in its behalf and if life may not be spent in its behalf, life has no worth at all. Some reach this height and conquer self and circumstance, but they are few indeed. There are not many objects in this world worthy of such devotion. Men will set themselves apart in this supreme sense more readily when it is for all than when it is for a few; perhaps a scientific or humanitarian objective.

When the Christian Church was young she was blessed by the words of one who reached mountain tops of self renunciation and utter consecration. If ever human lips said truly "It is not necessary for me to live, but if I do, life can have but one object before me" it was said by this man. *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live; but Christ lives in me"* (Gal. 2.20) said this fully surrendered soul. *"For me to live is Christ, to die is gain"* (Phil 1.21) he wrote on another occasion to his perturbed and wondering brethren. These words were not uttered in the thoughtless flush of youth but in the years when judgment was mature. Paul was getting well on in years, yet not so old that he was senile and worn-out. There was yet much vital energy and drive left in his fervent soul. He had not reached "retiring" age. He was not ready for his "easy chair," yet with all this unspent reserve of capacity to "do", he was ready to subjugate his whole interest in life for his Master's sake and live, if his Master wished for him to live; or die, if that was his Master's will.

It is not possible here to trace the full outline of his circumstances except to say that it was a "crisis" time in his life. He was in chains, under arrest, and waiting the verdict from Caesar's

Court. Brethren in Philippi were disturbed about this situation, and wondered why it should have come about. They could not understand why 'Providence' should have permitted the Gospel's most zealous ambassador to be put in chains; but that ambassador was under no uncertainty himself. He had no need to be uncertain. He had committed himself into Jesus' hands, to serve him just as long as Jesus desired, and to lay down his ambassador's role and go to "sleep" just when his Master pleased. There were no "second causes" in his life. No other hand than Jesus' could mark out his path. It did not lie with Imperial Caesar to interfere with his life's destiny. His life's objectives were not contingent upon the whim or mood of any man. The decisions that affected his life were made in heaven by his own Lord, and none could say him nay. He was his Master's chattel, his Master's slave, his Master's voice, and his Master could do His will in every sense, alike in him, and "for" him, and "by" him. He knew his Master had lived and died, and by the Father's power had mounted up on the other side of death to glory, honour and immortality. His Master received "*all power in heaven and earth*" and was waiting till the whole world should be made His footstool. Death could have no further dominion over that exalted One. If today, tomorrow, or any day, his Master should decide that his journey was done and his service at an end, there was nothing else to be said but that he would lay himself upon the headman's block as readily as on his nightly couch. There is something delightful in this utter abandon to the Master's will. To have no choice of this or that apart from Him is rest and peace. To care not if we live, or if we die, if thus His will is done, is victory indeed. To yield one's self to His embrace with infant like, dead-weight in mother's arms, is ever his delight.

We need to take stock of these things today. God has not made any promise to preserve in unconditional physical safety any child of grace. The story of the faithful Church has been one of death and suffering, from the beginning of its career. Stephen was crushed with stones. James was slain by Herod. The catacombs of Rome were filled with heroic dead. The Waldenses, the Albigenses and Huguenots were ruthlessly cut down. Europe was deluged for a hundred years with blood. The saints were given into one persecutor's hand for "*a time, times, and the*

dividing of a time" (Dan. 7.25), Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, "*I send prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town.*" (Matt. 23.34). God promises no immunity from violence to the followers of the Lamb, but He does promise grace enough to help them bear their lot. While no complete immunity has been proclaimed, no one, nor any other agency can lay God's children low till His due time has come. "*They sought to take him, but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come*" (John 7. 30, 8. 20). Later on the Master said "*The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified*" (John 12.23,27), "*Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father; save me from this hour; but for this cause came I to this hour.*"

In these troubled days the child of God who holds earthly things loosely, and begins each day with resignation to finish his course that day with gladness should the Lord permit, can find rest and peace of heart. The child who knows he cannot end his days till God's due time, has God himself at the helm of his life. With God at the helm, his life cannot be wrecked by any storm until He pilots him into port. If any saint of God thinks that the world or any part of it cannot go on without his oversight, and that it is essential for him to live on its behalf, that saint has much to learn. He has not yet realized that the only object of the Christian's life is "Christ", and should he live, or die, he is the Lord's.

TH

Dying with Jesus by death reckoned mine;
Living with Jesus a new life divine;
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine –
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine.
Moment by moment I'm kept in His love
Moment by moment I've life from above
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine;
Moment by moment, O Lord I am thine.

D. W. Whittle

'No longer I but Christ' – I may not choose,
But follow each command, nor e'er refuse
A call to service, whatsoe'er it be,
For Jesus calls and is enough for me.
O life of sweetest liberty so blest
I yield Him all, and he does all the rest.

Freda Hanbury Allen

PARABLE OF A FERRY BOAT

*A lesson from
Old Father Thames*

Leaning on the parapet, he watched the steam ferry boat making its leisurely way across the river. A queer, ungainly looking craft it was, sitting squat and flat on the water, its two tall funnels standing up straight, one at each end of the motley load of vans, lorries and cars. For more than fifty years now it has plied to and fro between its two landing stages, never venturing up or down stream more than has been necessary to avoid other river traffic. As often as not it makes part of the journey floating sideways in the grip of the tide which flows strongly at this point. Its paddle wheels make a great deal of noise and throw up a lot of spray, but the boat never gets up any considerable speed, for it is heavy and cumbersome and it isn't far across the river.

A short, sharp blast echoed imperiously over the water. A small motor vessel, making its way down the river, was warning the slow-moving ferry of its approach. The heavily laden craft hesitated, slowed down, its paddles whirling furiously first in one direction and then in the other as it manoeuvred and turned in the endeavour to leave a clear passage for the faster boat. The other vessel deviated slightly from its course and passed from one side to the other at the stern of the ferry. The sound of its engine came strongly upon the ear as it speeded up and soon it was but a speck in the distance, heading for the open sea. Now the ferry boat was at the far landing stage, its paddles slowly revolving to hold it stationary against the urge of the swiftly flowing tide.

As the observer leaned on the parapet he thought to himself how many Christian organisations and institutions become like that ferry boat. They pass continually backward and forward across the river of Truth at the point where they began their corporate work. They repeat the same unceasing round of activity and always maintain the same outlook. Their paddles constantly thresh up the same water and always fight against the flowing tide that would carry them to shores undreamed of and show them vistas of which they had not conceived. Then perchance there comes a band of Christians who are not content to man a ferry boat. They would travel down the ever widening and ever deepening river

of Truth until it merges into the ocean of the fulness of Divine revelation. There is much ado to keep the institution with all its lading well clear of the venturesome rovers, lest there is a collision and untoward consequences to vested interests.

There are so many today who want their religion and their Christian activity made safe for them. It is so easy to join the crew of the ferry boat, to be very busy with the work of taking travellers across the river and back again, day after day. The pioneer, travelling the course of the river, feels the upward lift of the heaving billows, senses the keen air and fresh wind and comes out into the open sea. Upon the horizon he sees, dimly yet but ever growing clearer, the palaces and temples, the cliffs and mountains, of that glory land which is the world that shall be. The crew of the ferry boat sees nothing but the grimy buildings and smoky factories of the earthly city within which their whole lives are being spent.

Let us be pioneers, like those Pilgrim Fathers who set out to colonise America. "The Lord hath yet more Truth to break forth from his Holy Word" was the parting charge to them of their Pastor, John Robinson, and in the power of that admonition they went forth to lay the foundations of a new world. "*The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream, and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.*" Only so will our Christian witness be effective. No witness that is not based upon the best and deepest understanding of the Divine plan that it is possible for us to attain, can be expected to meet the needs and the problems of this generation. The catchwords and allusions that were intelligible to men and women generations ago mean nothing to their children today, and so it comes about that it is not only Truth that is progressive but witness is progressive also. Let us see to it that our own vision of the coming Kingdom is that which is seen, not from the deck of a city ferry boat, flat-down on the muddy river waters, but from the bows of sea-going vessels. There, high upon the ocean billows, sea and sky alike tell of the majesty and power of God in creation and revelation.

AOH
(Reprinted from BSM 1958)



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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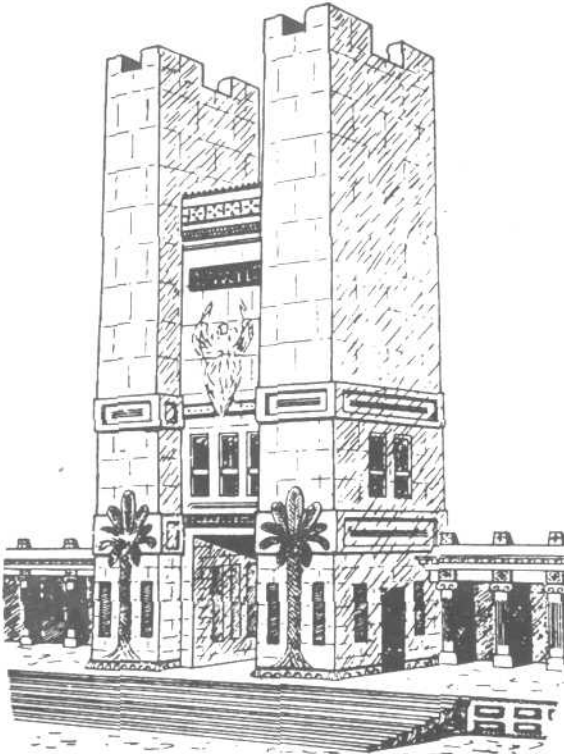
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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Just a Word

"Do you remember the generosity of Jesus Christ, the Lord of us all? He was rich beyond our telling, yet he became poor for your sakes so that his poverty might make you rich." (2 Corinthians 8.9 Phillips). Our Lord Jesus Christ was rich. He was the richest, Son of the Most High, heir of all things. Yet He impoverished Himself (1) so that we might share His riches. He became like us so that we might become like Him. The word used here for poor is not just someone who struggles to make ends meet, and who lives daily on the bread line. There were plenty like that in Israel when Jesus came into the world. One bad harvest and it could be absolute disaster. This is the sad story for most of Bible history. There were frequent famines and beggars everywhere. Handicapped people had little opportunity to earn a living. The word from which "became poor" is translated is only used the once in the New Testament. It means 'abject poverty' (2), destitute (3) and of it Barclay (4) writes "If a man is downtrodden and oppressed ... he has no influence on earth. ... He cannot look to man for help ... he can only look to God ... therefore these words ... describe people who, because they have nothing on earth, have come to put their complete trust in God". He shows the connection with the first beatitude.

The Scriptures indicate that affluence encourages moral decay and they are more concerned with spiritual poverty. Human sin and degradation for thousands of years have not made this planet the place its Creator intended. Jesus gave up all He had to experience it and identify with the poorest of our race. He had nowhere to lay His head. He knew what it was like to be destitute. Did it really have to come to this? What would Earth's millions have said if He had come to this planet and lived it up in Kings' Palaces?

Paul is saying to the church at Corinth, again in Barclay's (5) words, "With that tremendous, heart-moving example of generosity before you, how can you hold back?" At this time of year, whatever we think of the 'festival', there are many opportunities to help the world's destitute. We have a wonderful Example. The Calypso Carol has a final word

Mine are riches – from thy poverty:
From thine innocence, eternity:
Mine forgiveness by thy death for me,
Child of sorrow for my joy.

Michael Perry

DN

(1) Alfred Marshall (2) Marvin Vincent (3) Vine (4) New Testament Words (5) Letters to the Corinthians.

Renewal Time

You will find a 'Renewal Form' in this issue of the Bible Study Monthly. Please fill it in, writing clearly, and return it to Bible Fellowship Union, to whom cheques (checks) should be made payable. We are very grateful for every gift received, but no one should hesitate to request the magazine because they can't send a gift. All BFU literature is free. If any have difficulty in returning the renewal form or forget it, none should worry. We do not cancel your copy of the magazine until we are

certain that it is no longer wanted. Of course, if you change your address without telling us where you've gone, we can't continue to send to you. We are always pleased to send the Bible Study Monthly wherever it is wanted – so tell a friend about it.

Readers in UK will find an extra form in their BSM. It is for those readers who want to send a gift and who pay income tax at normal rate. Please fill in this form also and return it with the renewal form.

HE SHALL BE GREAT

A Christmas Message

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the highest." (Luke 1.32)

In this world, men are accounted great because they have achieved some noteworthy thing that has produced immediate results. A skilful general wins a crucial battle and he is considered to be a great soldier. A commercial magnate welds a number of trading organisations into one enormous unit, controlling a major part of some vital commodity and he is regarded as a great businessman. A shrewd and plausible politician rises to the top by his astute handling of foreign affairs and he is spoken of as a great statesman. None of these is called great while as yet he is in the state of progress towards his goal, while his plans are developing but only when he has 'arrived'. The world demands not only success but also the visible evidences of success, before it will bestow its praise. The man who patiently and zealously builds for the future, knowing that his goal will not be reached in his own lifetime is never esteemed great whilst yet he lives. The fruit of his labours will only be reaped by posterity and recognition may only come after his death, when at last the realisation of all his dreams is there for all to see.

So it is with our Lord Jesus Christ. Of all great men He is the greatest. He came down from Heaven to achieve the greatest work of all time, the redemption and reconciliation of mankind and the consummation of God's creative Plan. His greatness was not recognised then, but in days to come it will be plain for all to see. *"He shall be great"* is the promise and it cannot fail to be fulfilled. Men and angels will join together in worship and adoration, praising and blessing the name of the Son, that His name may be exalted above every name. *"At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, ... and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."* (Phil. 2.10,11)

At the time of His birth there was no evidence of coming greatness. He was born in the meanest of mean circumstances, lowly descendant of a once kingly line from which all the insignia and trappings of kingship had long since departed. He was born the citizen of a conquered and subject people; into a humble workaday environment. What promise of greatness reposed here? His only

credentials were those declared by an old prophet and an aged woman Temple attendant, neither of them of any moment or influence in the world of big things. Who would have thought that this infant son of a village maiden would start a fire that was destined to sweep the world and never be put out? Who would have thought that this tiny babe was foreordained to outlive all the kings who ruled at His birth and to succeed to the kingship of the world when all their thrones had been swept away? Who would have thought that this little life which came so quietly and unobtrusively into the world would catch up and knit together so many other lives through generations yet unborn. That it would make them a mighty striking force and a power so great that even the proud gates of hell will not prevail against it? That was to be the outcome, that has not been fully realised even as yet, but an outcome that will surely one day cause all men to recognise the true greatness of that Light which two thousand years ago came into the world.

We do perceive the greatness. To us He is already great. How could it be otherwise? We know of the mighty power that descended upon the church at Pentecost and has remained since with all whose lives have been given to Him. True, we may not yet find it possible to perform outwardly mighty works. So far as the world is concerned there is still little evidence of the power that is preparing and fitting us for the full revelation to all men which is to come "at His appearing". Without the long years of that inward working in our hearts and minds we would be quite unready for the duties and responsibilities which will devolve upon us directly the Messianic Kingdom is established in power and the word of the Lord begins to go out to all people.

During the early years of the twentieth century a young man in his early thirties lived in London. He was poor and was equipping himself to deliver his people. Daily he read and studied in the British Museum. He was unknown and few took him seriously. A decade or so later Lenin was accepted by his people and he gave them the draft constitution that was to guide millions for most of that century. We may profoundly disagree with his political system. He was an atheist and his achievement was a purely material one. Many in

his own land now discredit him. However, the principle of small unnoticed beginnings which for a time grew into a mighty international force, may be compared with our King.

He too was despised and rejected of men, accounted a dreamer and an enthusiast, ignored and unheeded in the days of His life on Earth. His followers too, are accounted fools for His sake. *The world does not really believe that the saints are going to reign.* Men do not take seriously the oft-repeated declaration that in a day yet to come the Lord Jesus will assume His great power and command all men's obedience. The disciples of Jesus go about their studies and training, conspicuous only by their poverty in the things of this world, and their absolute devotion to the ideal that is set before them – and the world smiles tolerantly and takes no further notice.

One day our King will stand up, no longer a nonentity in the counsels of the world. He also will proceed to the creation of a new social order, one which will embrace not half the world but the

whole of the world *"His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."* (Zech. 9.10) The kings of the earth will fight against it, to crush what they hate; but they will fail to arrest its progress. The Rider of the White Horse will cleave the heavens in His descent to the last great battle and the powers of this world will give way for the last time. The kingdoms of this world will have become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ – and He shall reign for ever and ever.

"He shall be great!" The promise stands, disbelieved and disowned by the world of men. They will believe, in that day when He stands up to command obedience. There will be no uncertainty about the matter then, no disputing. The benefits of that Kingdom will be abundantly manifest to all, and in their joy and exaltation of spirit men will declaim to the heavens *"This is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us ... we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."* (Isaiah 25.9)

AOH

JOY IN HEAVEN

*Reflections on
Luke 15.3-7*

It was a lovely Sunday morning and the congregation settled back in their seats. The pastor began his sermon on the love of God. As the light of the summer day filtered through the church windows so new light came as the sermon progressed; thoughts and words blended together in harmony as the truth came through.

We think so often of God's love and how it affects us. It comforts in trouble, it provides shelter and food, and the hope of heaven at last, but rarely if ever do we think of the joy and gladness which the exercise of love brings to His heart.

Who, the pastor was saying, could tell us better than Jesus? He who came to tell us what His Father is really like. In His parables, He put heavenly truth into earthly language. Just imagine trying to tell a caterpillar on a cabbage leaf that one day it would fly in the air like a bird. A parable would be the only way. Jesus did just this in the parable of the 'Lost Sheep'.

As I heard the story once again I saw in my imagination the shepherd leaving his flock in the safety of the fold. Setting out in the gathering darkness, he went over rough and stony paths with sad face and anxious heart with one hope and

purpose in mind; to find the sheep that was lost. On and on he goes down the valleys and up the hillsides, stopping ever and anon to listen and peer into the darkness, hoping to hear a rustle of movement or faint bleat telling him that his long search is over. Then with hope almost gone he stops and there at last is the sound he has been longing to hear. I can imagine his feelings now as his pulse quickens, alert and eager he presses on. He is regardless of the thorns that tear at his hand and the stones that cut into his feet until he gathers the helpless sheep in his arms placing it on his shoulders. With carefree steps he returns to the fold and home. Overflowing pleasure and joy is shared with friends and neighbours as he tells of the sheep that was lost but now is found. *"Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety nine righteous persons that need no repentance"*. God was more loving and real than I had ever realised before. I was so glad that the Almighty could find pleasure in me, even me.

TJW

THE BANNER OF TRUTH

"Thou hast given a banner to them that fear (reverence) thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth." (Psalm 60.4).

Truth is the guiding principle of all creation. When God began to bring material things into existence He ordained Truth as the standard by which all things must be measured. So closely interlocked are all the processes by which the universe is ordered and men live that only those things that stand the test of truth can continue in existence. That is why, in the superb scene of the Heavenly City with which the Bible closes, *"there shall nothing enter into it that ... maketh a lie"*.

This fundamental principle emerges in the Old Testament as Divine steadfastness. God is One upon whom reliance may be placed. Forever is God's truth established in Heaven. Through all the shifting scenes of sin it stands as a beacon light, showing where God is, in the darkness of this world's night. In a very special sense, God is identified with Truth, so that we can logically say God is Truth in the same way that "God is love". Moses in Deut. 32.4 refers to Him as *"a God of truth and without iniquity. Just and right is he"*. In that brief sentence three important words are brought together: Truth, Justice and Righteousness. In all the developing story of God's ways those three words stand together and God stands in the centre of them. Read the book of the prophet Isaiah and note how many times he uses the expressions *"In the God of truth"* and *"by the God of Truth"*. That golden-tongued man of God knew full well that nothing can stand eternally, except it be founded on truth. Perhaps that was why, in the opening chapters of his prophecy he so bitterly condemned the hypocrisy of Israel's leaders.

But Truth must be revealed and made known if men are to order their lives by its principles and so fulfil the Creator's intentions. On the lower level of human existence, the laws of creation must be known and understood if men are to conduct their lives in the way that assures continuing life. On the higher level, men must be brought to a knowledge of the will of God and of their relationship with God if they are intelligently to take the place in His plans for which He created them. So it became necessary for God to reveal Himself and His Truth, in a manner men could understand. The Psalmist knew of that need when he cried *"O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring*

me to thy holy hill and to thy dwelling!" (Psa. 43.3)

How then can God reveal Himself to men? He dwells *"in unapproachable light whom no man has ever seen, nor can see."* (1 Tim. 6.16). *"Canst thou by searching, find out God"* asked the Arabian sage (Job 11.7). The ancients used to talk about a high mountain in the far north away from the haunts of men, which they call *"the sides of the north"* and there said they, God dwelt, but no man could ever ascend to see Him or converse with Him. His messengers might come to man, but man could not go to Him. How then can He reveal Himself to man? The Apostle John gives the answer. *"No one has ever seen God; but God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart, he has made him known."* (John 1.18). That brings us to a very vital connection between the Truth of God and the Word of God.

"The Word was made flesh." That became true in history when Jesus the son of Mary appeared among men, but the Word of God had come to men before that. Even in the times of creation, before mankind existed, the Word of God was active. *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made"* says the Psalmist (Psa. 33.6). In a very wonderful manner that Word of the Lord is invested with the idea of personality, and identified with Divine Wisdom in Proverbs 8, and charged with a message to mankind. *"Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. Hear, for I will speak of excellent things ... for my mouth shall speak truth ... the words of my mouth are in righteousness. ... The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was ... Blessed is the man that heareth me ... for whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain the favour of the Lord."*

In the days of the Old Testament, therefore, God was at work revealing Himself to mankind by His Word, that mysterious Wisdom made the heavens (Psa. 136.5) and founded the earth (Prov. 3.19). We find that *"the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the Word of the Lord"* (1 Sam. 3.21). Does this mean that the Word appeared in visible form to Samuel and held converse as a man does with man? There were certainly other occasions in the Old Testament history when such an appearance was manifest to the eyes of certain men and women; in such cases

the subjects of such visits were made aware that they had to do with a visitant from God. There is nothing very informative about any of these appearances; the message given usually had to do with some situation at the time, but Scripture is plain that they were direct manifestations of God to men. "Theophanies" is the theological term nowadays used to describe them meaning 'appearances of God' and in some cases the language is quite direct. This is so in Genesis 18 when Abraham is said to have stood before the Lord, spoken to Him, received answers, and eventually *"the Lord went his way as soon as he had left communing with Abraham"*. The Word was the manifestation of God to men in Old Testament days and the channel of His instructions to the Patriarchs. It is interesting, though, to notice that instruction in the future long-term purposes of God did not come through the Word, but through the Spirit. *"Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1.21). The authority of God was revealed by the Word; the purposes of God by the Spirit.

In the New Testament times came a deeper revelation; *"The Word was made flesh"*. The Word of God stood before men in visible form; the Word of God laid hold upon human nature and became man, who *"spoke as never man spoke"*. Here at last was a witness to the Truth which could not be gainsaid, and that is what He did say of Himself. *"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."* (John 18.37) So the world at last was able to hear the Truth proclaimed in terms that every man could understand. Christ was the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1.24) and the message He proclaimed testified alike to the power and the wisdom of One who is the ultimate source of Truth.

It is a remarkable fact that in the Gospels the expression *"The Word of God"*, in the sense of a truth-bearing proclamation, is never used during the ministry of Jesus. The latest occasion was six months before Jesus came to Jordan when according to Luke 3.2 *"The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness"*. After that the active ministry of the Word of God appears to have ceased until after the Ascension, then the Word of God again went out in power, and in the Book of Acts there are recorded more than

forty instances. During the ministry of Jesus we find that the expression *"my words"* replaces *"the word of God"*, and this is just as it should be. In His own person our Lord Jesus Christ was the truth of God, the Word of God, manifested in the flesh, and the words which He uttered were in deed and in truth *"the Word of God"*. *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"* He said; *"I am the Light of the world"*.

Here then, in the earthly ministry of our Lord, was the banner of Truth first raised on high and displayed. True, only a small and relatively insignificant section of earth's multitudes saw it, for the First Advent of Jesus was confined entirely to Judea and Galilee. The important thing to observe is that here, and in this manner, God caused His Truth to break through into earthly affairs, and be displayed before men. Moreover, once displayed, this Truth is never to leave the earth, for God had provided that after the brief sojourn of the *"Word made flesh"*, others, men and women who themselves had been illumined by this Light would become receptacles and dispensers of the Truth. Behind the visible *"Word made flesh"* there stood the mighty invisible power of the Holy Spirit, which was never to leave the earth, but to continue from generation to generation, imparting Truth to those who would raise aloft and display the banner in the sight of men.

So the Word was entrusted to the Church. We talk sometimes about the Church's commission to witness to the Gospel *"in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth,"* (Acts 1.8) but in fact this is something much more fundamental than a preaching mandate. The Church is the repository of the Word of God during this Age; it is really no exaggeration to say that God reveals Himself to mankind during the period between the First and Second Advents, by means of the Church. It is a solemn thought and a solemn responsibility. The Church is not only God's witness in the world, it is also a light in the world, and it holds forth the Word of life. In so many ways is the work of Christ when upon earth imitated by His own followers in their collective association together as members of His Body. The power by which this responsibility is discharged is the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised would be conferred upon His disciples as soon as their work began. Small wonder, then, that the first recorded reaction to those disciples was *"So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily"* (Acts 19.20).

The banner of truth had been given to the church, to be displayed. The principle object and work of that display is the gathering out from among the nations "*a people for his name*". Although the world will most certainly not be converted during this age or before the Second Advent of our Lord in glory and power, it is still true that the Holy Spirit, operating in and through the consecrated members of Christ's Church, is providing a channel through which the Word of God may come to anyone who has an ear to hear.

This is a big step forward from the days of the First Advent. Then, the Word of God came only to a few, a small community of people gathered in one corner of the earth, and the echoes of its tones hardly reached outside that little nation and country. But in two thousand years that have elapsed since that time, the Word of God has traversed every part of the globe where men live. It has followed the migration of nations as they ventured into lands that had never known human inhabitant. It is not yet true that all men have heard the word; the Spirit has not yet been poured out upon all flesh; but the banner has been displayed in all lands. With the fulfilment of the prediction that the Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations before the end of the Age, another great step in the onward progress of the Divine plan has been taken.

So the last great Age of human history is introduced, the Age during which the Holy Spirit of God will enter every human heart that can be made receptive, and God be revealed through His Word to all men. "*It shall come to pass that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.*" Even that final outpouring is to be preceded by the intervention of the Lord Jesus in power and glory; we are given a picture in the book of Revelation of the heavens being opened and a Rider on a White Horse appearing, leading the armies of heaven, and His name, we are told, is the Word of God. That heavenly intervention is not only for the destruction of Heaven's enemies, a theme so vividly pictured in the visions of Revelation; it is also for the purpose of manifesting the truth. Says Isaiah the prophet "*In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the nations seek*" (Isa. 11.10). Again we have the banner displayed – the banner and the ensign are one and the same thing – and the nations gather around that banner. At long last the word of God will reach all nations and all

mankind, and the Holy Spirit will be active in bringing whosoever will into absolute harmony with God.

"*The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'*" (Rev. 22.17). Why the Spirit? Would it not be more appropriate to say "the Bridegroom and the Bride say 'Come'"? Perhaps the old creedal definition of the Spirit as "proceeding from the Father and the Son" may help us here. There are four powers involved in this question of winning and restoring the human race; the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and the Church. It is the Father, who as Creator and First Cause, calls His erring children back into harmony with Him and His ways. It is the Father in the Son who reigns over the nations and rules them like a shepherd. It is the Father by the Holy Spirit who quickens the minds of men that they may see out of obscurity and out of darkness and come to walk in the light of the Lord. It is the Father through the Church who shows men how they may renounce sin and turn to serve the living God, and encourage them to come to the point of repentance and conversion, the first step on the way that leads into the everlasting Kingdom. So perhaps the picture in Revelation is looking at the work going on in men's hearts, where the illumination of the Holy Spirit, coupled with the missionary endeavour of the glorified saints, combines to call the repentant one to "Come" to the feet of Jesus. He is the eternal King, the One in whose name alone they may, at the end, stand before the Throne of God and be adjudged worthy of life everlasting.

So the banner of Truth must, and will, be displayed, until at length all men accept its unswerving witness in the universal comprehension of Divine Truth. "*The knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.*" Divine Truth will always continue to come to man from God, for man cannot live without the constant flow of truth from God, any more than plants and trees can continue to live without the constant flow of heat and light from the sun. "*The entrance of thy words giveth light*" said the Psalmist. Divine Truth is life-giving, healing, building-up, to the soul, as light is to the body. It is only in complete and utter dependence upon God and the constant reception of His Truth that men will live on in the never ending years of the Ages of Glory. "*For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*"

*Rebecca C. Doney***CHRISTMAS BELLS***From BSM December 1942*

Oh! Christmas bells, ye ring and ring!
I hear your music pealing
To me there's mockery in your tones
As on the air you're stealing.
For Peace is but an empty name,
Good will? Ah! Who can find it?
The god of greed stalks o'er the earth
And misery walks behind it.

Oh, Christmas bells, there's other sounds
That fill the air with sighing;
The earth brings forth enough for all
But men for bread are crying.
Tho' they may give them Christmas cheer
And think to banish sorrow,
Yet while they fill their hungry mouths
They're shivering o'er tomorrow.

All round the world is heard the sound
Of busy hammers ringing,
Where hands are forging guns for war,
While lips of peace are singing;
Gigantic vessels sail the seas,
All fitted out for killing,
And man with hatred in his heart
His brother's blood is spilling.

Oh, bells, the curse is over all,
And Adam's children languish,
Back there at Eden's gate began
Six thousand years of anguish.
For God's wrath rested on the race,
The marks are all about us,
Go look, go search the whole wide earth
And see what sin has brought us.

On every hand disease holds sway,
How pitiful the moaning,
You cannot cover up the truth
The whole creation's groaning.
Vice, crime and evil prey on man,
And death fills up the measure,
Your ringing o'er ten billion graves
How can ye ring of pleasure?

Oh, bells, don't ring of empty joys
That vanish with the morrow
Ring out the plan our God has formed
To drive away all sorrow;
Tell earth the song the angels sang
Is yet to have fulfilling,
That God will give eternal joys
To all who shall be willing.

Oh bells, ring out the prospect grand,
To reign with Christ in power,
Bestowing blessing on mankind
In that triumphant hour.
Tell all the world the time is near
And daily drawing nearer,
And whether they forbear or hear
Just ring it louder, clearer.

Tell them, oh bells, their long lost dead
Shall all come back from prison,
And if they ask you for your proof
Tell them the Lord has risen,
And has the keys of death and hell,
And power to wake the sleeping,
And raise them up to perfect life
And end earth's night of weeping.

But the proud world won't hear your tale
They'll say you're only dreaming,
That they are fit to rule themselves,
By their own plans and scheming;
So God will bring them to the dust,
The sentence has been spoken,
Dark clouds of wrath shall o'er them roll
Until their hearts are broken.

And when the world is on its knees
In that dark bitter hour,
With human pride for ever gone
Then bells, ring out in power.
Poor man will surely need some hope,
In that dark time of sorrow.
Tell them the night is almost past,
And joy comes with the morrow.

Then Christ will wipe away all tears
And give them songs for sighing,
And never more in all the earth
Shall come the sound of crying;
Oh bells, if all should realise
The blessing just before us,
"Thy Kingdom Come" from earth would rise
In one grand mighty chorus.

A perfect race, a perfect earth
And love each one adorning.
Oh bells I don't know how to wait
For Christ's Millennial Morning;
And when you see the earth made new
With not a trace of sadness;
Then bells I really think that you
Will almost burst with gladness.

THE SAVING POWER OF GOD

*A study of the
work of Christ*

6. Sanctification

"To the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours." (1 Cor. 1.2 RSV)

Sanctify and sanctification are words which mean "to make holy". The idea of holiness appears to have become explicit at the time of the covenant at Sinai and the first record of anything being holy is the ground upon which Moses stood at the Burning Bush to receive his great commission. The thought is implicit in the record of man from the Garden of Eden in that God could not tolerate sin and that which was sinful had to be destroyed. That is the lesson of Genesis chapters 2-11 and the theme follows through the life of Abraham and the patriarchs. Until the time of the Exodus positive holiness tends to be taken for granted and then it is clarified at the time of the Sinaitic covenant as the Law of God unfolds in the Pentateuch. This was a remarkable revelation associated with the new understanding of God, His name and His character. The concept of holiness is enshrined in texts such as Psalm 22. 3 *"Yet thou art holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel"* and again in Isa. 6.3 *"Holy, holy holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."* The prophecy of Isaiah is perhaps the most glorious exposition of the holiness of God and it is a theme that follows, in one way or another throughout the book.

It was the work of the covenant that Israel should be a holy nation; and that their relationship to God would make them like Himself. The covenant to Israel promised that they should *"be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation."* (Exodus 19.6). One is immediately confronted with the question as to whether that was a present experience or a future hope. In a similar way Leviticus 19.2 says *"you shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy"* and a little further on *"consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the Lord your God"* (Lev. 20.7). As we look through the texts in the Old Testament we are faced with a problem which is not totally resolved even in the New Testament. Israel, because the people had the covenant, the oracles and the very presence of God in their midst was a holy people; holy at least in the sense that they were different and set apart from all peoples of the earth. Yet the

land of Egypt was not far behind and the covenant not long made in the words *"all that the Lord has spoken we will do"* when they most flagrantly disobeyed the most important terms of the contract by making a golden calf. The people became polluted in worship and moral behaviour. The very existence of the sacrificial system attached to the Law Covenant, implies that Israel needed continually to be 're-made' holy. Thus individuals and the whole nation were continually in a sanctifying process, so that they could remain before God as 'holy and acceptable'.

The two-fold meaning of the word sanctification is continued through the New Testament. Sanctification is the condition or state of those who accept the sacrifice of Jesus as a means of redemption from sin and in that situation they are acceptable to God. The writer to the Hebrews (10.20-22) takes our minds back to the tabernacle of old by saying that *"since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ... hearts sprinkled clean ... bodies washed with pure water"*. All this speaks to us of an accomplished fact and Jesus has done this so that we can enter God's presence. However, in the very next breath he says to us *"let us hold fast the confession"* which implies also that we may let go and lose our grip.

The fact that Paul on more than one occasion addressed the ordinary believers within the Churches to whom he was writing as "saints" makes it clear that in one sense he believed them to be 'holy ones', that is those whom Christ had cleansed. Sanctification has been defined as "the relationship with God into which men enter by faith in Christ". It is the next stage that follows reconciliation. If men in Christ were totally holy and perfect in every respect why should they not immediately pass from this troubled world without the long drawn out experience of life. James died within a few years of Jesus' resurrection but John, his brother, waited till he was an old man, perhaps for seventy years.

Justification has been called the deliverance from the penalty of sin. Sanctification is very close to it as the deliverance from the pollution, privation and power of sin. But it is clear that Paul explained as much as anyone the importance of the

second aspect of the doctrine of sanctification. He saw his Gentile brethren as justified and even reconciled to God, but he also saw their human nature weak and corrupt and liable to the sin that was all around them in the pagan cities.

So the believer must first be justified through the works of Christ and then the process of sanctification can begin. This is done by the power of the Holy Spirit that demands our co-operation and response in order that it can reach the maturity of perfection without which no man shall see the Lord. Nevertheless the parable of the vine (John 15) clearly shows that the Heavenly Vinedresser has the oversight of the work of pruning. Paul also writes, "*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word.*" (Eph. 6.26). Here again the work of sanctification is both an accomplished fact and washing is a process and it occurs by constant attention to the Bible, the Word of God.

The letters of Paul to Corinth contain some interesting references to sanctification that again touch upon both aspects. Opening the first letter the Apostle writes "*To the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus.*" Here sanctification has been completed and at the end of the chapter 1 Jesus is spoken of as our righteousness, sanctification and redemption. The finished work is again mentioned in ch. 6.11 as something that occurred in the past. As we turn to the second letter to Corinth we see the other aspect of sanctification. In ch. 7.1 Paul writes "*Since we have these promises beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit and make holiness perfect in the fear of the Lord.*" In his concluding thoughts upon the covenant in ch. 3.17,18 the Apostle writes of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, liberating believers from their old life and making possible the transformation into the likeness of the Lord's glory. A similar thought of preparation for the future is contained in Paul's exhortation in 2 Timothy 2.21 where he writes to his son in the faith concerning purifying himself from what is ignoble, to become a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house.

The two phases of sanctification are neatly defined in Romans 12.1,2 where Paul writes of our bodies being a holy and acceptable sacrifice through the mercies of God. He then goes on to show that this is a transformation process which

leads to perfection and in the words of Phillips' translation "*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould; but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good; meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.*" As we look through the epistles of Paul particularly those to Corinth and Galatia, it is apparent that like the apostle himself the churches have not yet become perfect or to have spiritually "*arrived*" (Phil. 3.13 Phillips). Therefore he urges them to press on towards the goal which is complete union with Christ. Paul uses this picture of the Greek games like an athlete striving for the prize. He uses this illustration as if something was hindering the Churches in their race. These are summarised by the writer to the Hebrews in 12.1 when he says, "Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely". The same applies to the analogy of warfare in which the Christian fights. Like Christ he fights against spiritual powers outside of himself, but also in warfare against sin, (Rom. 7.23). Peter too writes of the passions of the "*flesh that wage war against your soul.*" (1 Peter 2.11) Writers of the New Testament have a lot to say about the weakness of the flesh and the conflict between spirit and flesh. In Galatians 5 Paul writes of this conflict which obviously takes place during the Christian life and not before it begins.

It must also be seen from the texts that this work demands the active co-operation of believers. In 1 Cor. 3.9 and 2 Cor. 6.1, Paul writes of his brethren as being fellow workers with God and it is clear from the context of these verses that this applies to the work of salvation. Christians are being built up and purified for the day when they shall be ready for the ultimate work beyond this life. John expresses a similar thought in his first letter (3.2,3) which concludes, "*everyone who thus hopes in him, purifies himself as he is pure.*" The Scriptures show that when a sinner receives that 'finished work of Christ' he repents and accepts Him as Saviour but that this is not the end of the matter for in a sense it is only the beginning of it. Nor is a Christian life a matter of letting God do all the work. Life in Christ is a response to what God offers and a willingness to use His gifts until at last the work of grace is done and we are ready to receive a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to us on 'that day'.

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

*A Study of Prophecy
passing into History*

1. Bone coming to Bone

This short series is written against the background of belief held by many students of the prophetic word to the effect that before the Messianic Age commences there is a to be a restored and purified nation of Israel, gathered in the Holy Land in fulfilment of the Divine Promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that this restored nation is to play an important part in the evangelistic work of that Age.

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is a symbol-picture of Israel being regathered at the Time of the End. It is an important passage, not because it goes into detail concerning the events of that time but because it establishes the basic principles behind the order of events. The vision tells the student not to expect everything at once nor anything too soon or before its time. Perhaps the parable of the growing grain recorded by Mark "*First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear*" (Mark 4.28) is as good an illustration of the truth behind this vision of Ezekiel as any. There is an almost total correspondence although the allusion is to a totally different matter.

The vision probably belongs to the later stage of Ezekiel's ministry, the earlier stage, occupying the first twelve years of his captivity in Babylon, whilst Zedekiah reigned still at Jerusalem as a vassal of the Babylonians. It comprises in the main messages of denunciation and forecasts of coming destruction directed at the enemies of his people, Babylon, Assyria and Egypt, and words of condemnation against the apostates in Israel; there were many such to be condemned. This stage ends with chapter 32 of his prophecy. The remainder, from chapter 33 onwards, elaborates a different theme altogether, the Divine leading of Israel to the point of cleansing and re-acceptance into God's purposes. This includes their final testing in a time of fiery trial from which they emerge victorious and their ultimate position before God as a holy nation fitted and dedicated to this purpose in the day of world conversion when the eyes of all men are opened to God and His ways. The only date given in this section is that of the final vision, the restored Sanctuary (the Temple of Ezekiel) in chapters 40 to 48. This is dated some eleven years

after Zedekiah had been dethroned, the Temple had been destroyed and Jerusalem left in ruins, the land desolate and the people taken into an apparently hopeless captivity. It must have seemed then that Israel would never rise again. Somewhere about this time, Ezekiel saw this vision of the valley of dry bones and by inspiration of the Spirit interpreted it aright as depicting Israel's future restoration. As such it was a message of hope to captive Israel. It bade them look forward to a time when as a people, they would have learned the lesson all mankind have yet to learn that "*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Prov. 14.34) and so would be received back into the full enjoyment of their Divine commission to be a "*light to the nations*" and declare God's "*salvation to the ends of the earth*" (Isaiah 49.6). It is also a message to those Christians who live at the Time of the End, the time when Christ's Kingdom is about to supersede the kingdoms of men and occupy all the earth in all its glory. The essential factor in that Kingdom is the presence upon earth of a dedicated "holy nation" composed, at least predominantly, of the natural sons of Abraham, conscious at last of their momentous destiny. It is this holy nation upon earth, in close association with the glorified Church of Christ in heaven, which is to be the instrument in God's hand for the final act in the drama of sin and redemption, the conversion of "whosoever will" among all the nations, with Satan bound that he deceive the nations no more (Rev. 20.2).

The vision of Ezekiel 37 is an acted parable. It comprises three distinct stages of development and the correspondence can be clearly traced in the history of what might be called the latter day restoration of Israel. There is nothing fanciful in the impression formed by many Christian students of the signs of the times that the development of the nation of Israel is intimately related to the Divine purpose for world evangelisation. However a dispassionate view of the structure and outlook of modern Israel would seem to give little basis for expecting any great revival of Christian faith and evangelism to have its origin from that quarter. The story of the valley of dry bones would seem to

indicate that this apparent anomaly is just what might be expected at this time; the mills of God grind slowly but they achieve their purpose in the end.

The prophet found himself set down in a valley or more properly, a wide, flat plain. The ground there was covered with bones, the disjointed, scattered relics of what had once been men. Here, evidently, lay the remnants of a nation. Their enemies had overrun them, taken their cities and their goods for themselves, slain the last desperate defenders with the sword, and left their bodies to the jackals and the vultures. Only the bones remained and because it is not in the power of man to restore life to the dead, they lay in the dust, scorched in the sun by day and frozen in the cold by night. A fitting picture of the apparently hopeless state of Israel after their final scattering in the early years of the Christian era, when the six hundred years of slow submergence to the power of their enemies which began with Shalmaneser of Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon ended in the Roman dispersal of the residue of the ancient people into all lands and the closing of the land of Israel against them. From that time the sacred soil became the property successively of Roman, Christian, Arab, Turk, and Christian again, but never Israel, until 1948. Then a pitifully small remnant of that once proud people took grim and tenacious possession of a tiny portion of that once wide and prosperous land and renamed it Israel. But that was enough to mark a move forward in the development of God's purpose. That was at least an indication that the age-long "Times of the Gentiles" which Jesus declared (Luke 21.24) would be characterised by the subjection of Jerusalem to alien powers was drawing to its close. More than anything else, it was 1948 which began to give meaning to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones.

"He said to me, Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live and you shall know that I am the Lord." So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked,

there were sinews on them and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host." (Ezekiel 37.4-10).

There are three stages in the vision and these correspond to three clearly marked stages in the process of regathered Israel. First, there was a noise, and a shaking, the bones coming together, bone to bone, forming themselves as it were into complete skeletons, bereft of flesh but undeniably basic frameworks upon which bodies of flesh might afterwards conceivably be built. There was the growth of sinews, flesh and skin so that bony frameworks took more and more the frames of men. Muscles encircled and rippled around the bare skeletons, flesh filled the hollows, skin spread and covered the still forms so that now the valley was filled with recumbent bodies, without life. Vitality that alone could transform the valley of the dead into a living multitude was still missing. The third and final stage was when the Spirit of God swept from the heavens like a mighty wind, breathing into the nostrils of those lifeless bodies and filling their lungs. Eyes opened and limbs flexed as an exceedingly great army, fitted and ready for the commission and work that God was to lay upon them.

Just so, it may be, there are three distinct stages in the process of Israel's restoration in the latter days and their preparation for the Divine service. In the first two stages the vitalizing influence of the Divine spirit cannot be discerned even though God's power is manifest in what is evidently a necessary preliminary. The third stage involves the power of the Spirit, and a Spirit-led people strong now in the Lord of Hosts and ready to do Him service. We see not yet the third stage; the question now is to what extent the first two have passed into history.

Bone coming to bone! The first outward evidence of the coming re-constitution of the nation of Israel! For nearly two thousand years this people had been wanderers and sojourners in the earth, having no land they could call their own, yet

obstinately refusing to be assimilated into the nations among whom they dwelt. The Nineteenth Century Jew was still as clearly a Jew as his compatriot of the First Century, and just as passionately desirous of regaining his lost homeland. "Next year in Jerusalem" was always the prayer at the annual feasts and religious observances; "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill," was the heart-felt cry of the exile. The Nineteenth Century closed without any real prospect of the age-old hope being anywhere near fulfilment, even though the rise of political Zionism in 1878 under Theodore Herzl had at least kindled a fervour that was beginning to translate hope into action. Nine years later in 1887, Dr. Grattan Guinness in "Light for the Last Days" had concluded from his study of Bible prophecy that the year 1917, thirty years future, would prove to be a most momentous year. This was to be in the outworking of the Divine purpose with respect to the closing events of this Age and the opening of the next, the Millennial Age. In 1917 General Allenby entered Jerusalem at the head of British troops. Turkish rule gave way to British in the Middle East and the following year the celebrated 'Balfour Declaration' pledged British support for a Jewish home in Palestine; the first step to the re-creation of the nation of Israel. In 1922 Britain receive the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine and from then until 1936 immigration proceeded at an increasing rate as Jews from all parts of the world began to turn their faces Zion-ward.

Here, surely, from 1917 onward, bone began coming to bone. There was as yet no flesh; the land of Palestine, administered by Britain under the Mandate, was not a Jewish state and in fact Jews, Arabs and Turks had equal rights in it. The country was as much under the domination of the Gentiles as it had been before; the only difference was that the occupying power was a great deal more friendly toward the sons of Jacob than had been the previous rulers. The administration was more just and progressive and the country could begin to develop. Jewish enterprises began to be set up and to flourish; Jewish settlements and villages and towns began to spring up. Jews, oppressed and persecuted in other countries, began to migrate towards their ancient land. It was not long before Christian students began to point to the old prophecies and see in current events their

fulfilment. "I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather them from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth" cried Isaiah (43.5,6). "I will gather them out of all countries ... And I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely." said Jeremiah (32.37) and then again. "I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame. ... A great company shall return thither" (31.8). Perhaps one of the most widely quoted, especially at time of intense persecution was the eloquent message in Jer. 16. 14-16. "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt' but 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them;' For I will bring them back to their own land which I gave to their fathers." So the long banished exiles began to dream of a future day when they could dwell as citizens in their own land as of right.

There was little recognition of the hand of God in all this. A minority there was, as there is in every community and every age, which returned to the land in pious belief that God was about to redeem His promise of two and a half millennia standing. The majority went back frankly with the intention of trusting in the power of their own right arms to establish their position and make their way. The incentive and emphasis was a political and not a religious one. It is not surprising therefore that it all but foundered on the rock of the political re-adjustments of the great Powers during the nineteen-thirties. Arab nationalism was becoming a force to be reckoned with in world affairs and the idea of a Jewish state was not so attractive to the world's politicians. Soon the early rosy promises and honeyed speeches began to be forgotten and reasons were advanced for slowing up and even stopping the increasing trek of Jews to what they were now beginning to regard as their own land. The celebrated, or notorious, British White Paper of 1936 sounded the death knell to immediate Jewish hopes with its reduction of further immigration to negligible proportions and concessions to Arab interests. Then came the Second World War, and following that increasing impatience on the part of the West with what had

now become known as the 'Jewish problem', and demands from the Arab world that the whole so-called 'experiment' should be abandoned and complete Arab control substituted.

Thirty years from the liberation of Jerusalem and the Balfour Declaration which had been hailed as the commencement of a new era for the Jew, and these unhappy children of Abraham were apparently doomed to lose all they had achieved. The whole history of that thirty years was one of a rattling of bones, jerky disjointed movements of the dead endeavouring to make themselves a place in the world of men but achieving little more than bone coming to bone, unable so much as to clothe themselves with flesh. There was a noise, and a shaking, as the prophet said, discussion and clamour, quasi-military underground movements seeking by force to take what the Powers would not give willingly, but the sum total of it all was nothing more than the joining together of scattered bones to form their skeletons. There was no substance; there was no life. Britain had left Palestine a desolate and bankrupt land. Every form of civil and military authority had been withdrawn. Industry and trade was at a low ebb. There was no money and no international credit. Who would grant them to a people apparently destined to be overrun and submerged? Their enemies stood around them, ready to swoop on the prey. Israel was a bare skeleton. Bone had come to bone but

that was all.

That was the position in the year 1948, when at last Britain unilaterally relinquished the Mandate granted twenty-six years earlier by a now defunct League of Nations. They moved out of Palestine, and the Arabs moved in. The world waited with detached interest to see the apparently defenceless Jews pushed into the sea, and the politicians began to alter the colours on their maps. The newspaper reporters sharpened their pencils and their editors sketched the outlines of their editorial comments sympathizing with the vanquished and congratulating the victors. Many Jews and Christians, altogether but an insignificant few in the world of men, but believers in the purpose and promise of God, bowed their hearts and minds in prayer that His avowed purpose might stand.

A few days later a handful of men in Tel-Aviv proclaimed to the world the establishment of the new State of Israel. They called upon the nations for recognition as such, fought and soundly defeated the invading Arab forces. They pushed them back sufficiently far to draw for themselves a frontier within which they proceeded to build a self-governing and independent nation.

In 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, the flesh began to form around the dry bones.

(To be continued)

AOH

A FEAST OF WINES – 1

"Come, buy wine ... without money and without price" (Isaiah 55.1).

Neither the title nor the text would have much appeal for a temperance worker fighting the evils of strong drink, yet the words come with assurance and the ringing voice of invitation through one of God's most eloquent mouthpieces. Teachers and reformers have used the things about them, common to everyday life, to convey to people the messages of God concerning their personal or national life.

Wine is primarily an Oriental drink. From the days of Noah to the Revelation given to John, the books of the Bible are plentifully sprinkled with references to the vineyard, the gathering of the grape harvest, the treading of the winepress. These are references to the drinking of the cup filled with its varying contents to gladden the heart of man, to sadden or madly intoxicate the misguided and

weak who drink to excess.

The land of Palestine was rich in vineyards. Grapes grew on the terraced hills and were cultivated with much care and skill. Jacob's blessing on Judah was of an abundance of vines, choice vines so full of juice that he could, if he had wished, washed his garments in their wine (Gen. 49.11). The words seem an oblique forecast of that one whom Isaiah saw coming from Edom and Bozrah, red in his apparel, his garments like those who tread the winepress (Isaiah 63.1-3). One cluster of the grapes of Eshcol was brought to Joshua by the two spies, hung on a pole carried between them as a specimen of what the promised land could produce. To dwell under his own vine was a dream of domestic bliss, a vision of a future prosperity for every man. The poor did not own vineyards but to those rich enough to build their own houses the vineyard was as essential as a

garden is today to the average householder. The vine is a clinging plant originally grown along the ground, later trained on poles, in some instances developed into trees with long sturdy branches from which the grape clusters hung thickly. Severe pruning and rich feeding was the secret of successful vine growing, from which many valuable lessons have been drawn. In the highly picturesque language of the Scriptures the vine illustrates truths on the state of man and society which Jesus, the supreme teacher, was quick to use to further portray his own mission to mankind and his close relationship to his followers. Perhaps no plant has lent itself so readily to metaphor as the vine. Fruitful, painfully pruned, walled or hedged for protection; neglected, wildly entangled, pillaged, trodden down by wild boars, the vineyard presents a clear picture of the varying states of life, singly or as a whole. The keeper of the vineyard was constantly caring, always on the watch for the slightest intrusion of the enemy, "the little foxes which spoil the vines". Broken down defences let in larger foes which trampled down and destroyed a promising crop.

Israel was portrayed as such a vineyard, planted by God, whose early promise and fruitfulness was laid waste by wild beasts and casual passers-by, who plucked at the neglected, broken down vines with contempt and indifference. "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord*" wrote the Psalmist. But that nation is in poor shape spiritually and morally which has once known that blessedness and allowed it to be trodden down, treated with derision, losing its fruitfulness and beauty because it neglected to keep its defences in order. When men of faith go out, other things come in, bringing their evils with them. The fruitful vine then deteriorates into a strange vine whose fruit is sour, whose dregs are bitter and of no possible use to the welfare of man. In personal life the disorder is no less vivid. The "Song of Songs" mentions one who was so busy looking after the interests of others she neglected to keep her own in order. "*They made me the keeper of the vineyards but my own vineyard have I not kept.*" (1.6)

The busy person who is full of good works and always on the run from one activity to another, can be forgetful of the maxim that "charity begins at home". Such can be too full of affairs for a little quiet reflection, for silent meditation or a little honest self-scrutiny. They may be admirable

workers for good causes but personal failures in private life. Slackness and carelessness in thoughts and words are the small holes in the hedges through which come nibbling little foxes and later on boars come trampling down faith and truth. Then there are the passers-by who casually snap their fingers at those whose Christian practice is as undersized and poor as the fruit of a neglected vine. Writing to the Corinthians St. Paul confessed to such a danger in himself, lest having worked and travelled and suffered and preached, he should become a castaway (disqualified) through neglect and cultivation in himself of the fruits of the spirit (1 Cor. 9.27).

Not only Israel, or the church called from all nations, have been the vineyard of God, but in a larger sense the earth and the whole human race. In each case the owner of the vineyard is portrayed as a careful husbandman who has planned and planted, provided the watch tower and the wine press, expecting fruit in due season from those to whom he has leased the work of cultivation. But those tenants or work-people refuse the owner his just dues. Arrogantly regarding the property as their own they beat down all demands and opposition to their own claims. While God claims Israel, the church, and the earth, as the work of his hands, there has been a strong move to deny that claim, to get on without him and to take the fruit and the credit as their own just dues and accomplishments. This a situation for which there is only one humiliating remedy, a severe rebuke by the lawful owner.

The vat and the winepress are essential equipment to the vine grower, for the grapes are not grown merely to look luxuriously tempting to the eye and taste. They are grown to be crushed together into a common pool in which all their identity is lost in bringing vigour and satisfaction to those who partake in moderation of the life-giving fluid, for as such it was regarded by the ancients. Sweet wine was part of the priestly offering on both pagan and holy altars, designated by connoisseurs as "the nectar of the gods". Its medicinal values were recognized by that "Hebrew of the Hebrews" who advised his young friend Timothy to "*use a little wine for the sake of your stomach*" (1 Tim. 5.23).

Like every good thing provided for the pleasure and use of man it has been grossly abused. From first to last its intoxicating effects have reduced the

over indulgent to a state of stuttering, reeling, helplessness, which lowers human dignity. If metaphorical wine be the social, religious and political doctrines of nations by which they too have become drunken from time to time by the potency of strong and strange delusions, it cannot be surprising to find them reeling to and fro in a perilous state of collapse. Under such symbols of a brimming wine-cup, vats overflowing with wickedness, grapes of wrath trodden by anger in a mighty press, of inhabitants drunk on the heady wine of lawlessness, a picture is vividly drawn of a world hopelessly mad, out of control and in urgent need of attention. Jesus described himself as the True Vine, so implying a false vine, a counterfeit plant whose fruit was as deadly as his own was life-giving, a plant which like the tares sown by the enemy hand would have to be dealt with in due time and its evil fruits destroyed.

The juice of grapes was originally extracted by crushing them between two stones and the resultant liquid was the sweet or best of the wine. The rest was trodden by the feet and the gushing liquid later fermented for more general use. Thus there were and still remain in some old vineyards both the press and the vat for first and second grade wines. There were even third and fourth grades, sour and unrefined, the daily drink of the poor in purse. Often those who trod the grapes were dyed to the thighs with the rich juice, their garments soaked and splashed as they trod with strength and shouts of triumph the glistening loads cut and carted from the sunny terraces to their ultimate destiny. It is of such scenes that Isaiah writes when he asks, *"Who is this coming ... with his garments stained red? ... Why are your clothes all red like the garments of one treading grapes in the winepress?"* to which comes the ominous answer

"I have trodden the press alone for none of my people was with me. I trod the nations in anger ... and all my clothing was stained." (Isaiah 63.1-3). The grapes of wrath and the Divine trampling of the winepress have passed into classical literature as that action which may be seen or expected when righteous indignation moves against deliberate wickedness. It is a thorough stamping out of evils which slander His Holy Name, which mock all that is good, just and virtuous and which destroys life without mercy or regret. It even affects the beauty of the earth by a ruthless exploitation of its treasures. It is an ever-present warning to the waywardness of man, a statement of fact that the evil fruits of the world must at some time be cut down and cast into the winepress to meet their inevitable end at the hands and under the feet of Divine justice.

There are other less forceful pictures in which the domestic element is invoked for the encouragement of those struggling with the ups and downs of life, who endeavour to accept philosophically its iniquities, and find some pleasure in the mixed cup of their own lot. They have something to sing about as did those who cheerfully left their homes to lodge in tents in the vineyards during the time of the grape harvest. Whatever their share of the spoils or their pay for a day's labour, they rejoiced together. They piled up the baskets or carried them shoulder high to the vat to fling the bunches between the great presses or tread them underfoot to emerge as good wine to gladden the heart of the husbandman or add sparkle to some local feast. Such a feast was the marriage at Cana where Jesus was an invited guest.

(To be continued)

FAS

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

3. Sons or Slaves

"... because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir" (Gal. 4.6,7 RSV). While studying Paul's letters we are constantly aware that although he was a Hebrew, all his life he had been surrounded by Roman culture. He was able to weave into his discussions, illustrations culled from the Old Testament and

from his Greek-Roman background. To him it was natural to use metaphors and parabolic language. These enabled him to convey ideas in a way that our literal western minds sometimes find difficult.

As in his letter to Rome (8.15) Paul uses the word 'adoption' not in anyway to detract from the idea of sonship but to show that there had been and yet will be in the future, a change of status. He was dealing with Jews and non-Jews, and their

A Bible Study of Paul's letter to the Galatians

background culture was very dissimilar. Although he no longer allowed these differences to come between Hebrew and Gentile in fellowship (3.28) yet people from contrasting backgrounds tend to think in a specific cultural way. Both had been in slavery. The Jew had been slave to his own interpretation of God's law. The Gentile was in slavery to pagan religions that had all kinds of practices that held men in bondage to spirits and idols. All humanity was in the slavery of sin and Satan. Believers in Christ had surrendered their lives to God and believed in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. They had received the Holy Spirit, and this had given them a liberation from their past which could not be described in any other way than by that word 'adoption'. Sons and slaves passed through this change, a transformation that took them from the servile life of a minion into the freedom of adult independence. This was how Paul was trying to describe what had happened to the Galatians. Yet they were still sons through the Spirit and totally surrendered to God. Paul was deeply concerned that the process through which they had gone should not be reversed.

The key to this situation is not what we know but whom we know. In the passage in Galatians 4 Paul says that the believer is 'known by God'. The key to our relationship with God is to be found in Christ. This wonderful thought is found throughout Paul's writings. This is not surprising because his own life as a Christian had begun with the Lord Himself planting the idea in his mind on the road to Damascus in those words, so indelibly printed on his mind "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" There can only be one interpretation of that question and it lies in the fact that those who touch the brethren of the Lord touch Him, because they are in Him. The lesson must have been reinforced by his contact with Ananias in the city, because that godly man lived daily in the presence of Jesus. How could Saul of Tarsus ever go back to the old way of persecuting the church of God. That situation had been left behind forever and now he too shared the joy of being 'in Christ'. Everything that his new life meant was bound up in that relationship with the Lord. That was more precious than anything else in his life. Nothing would ever take it away (Rom. 8.38,39). Other things might change, differences in fellowship and development of ideas, but this one great fact remained the foundation and the anchor of his life. The whole purpose of God revolved round this relationship with the

Lord. The bond could never be broken and he was willing to be the slave of the Son of God. Yet it was slavery in absolute and total freedom such as no unbeliever could even begin to imagine. Paul could not contain his astonishment that his Christian brethren in Galatia could ever want to go back to the slavery of the human nature which held them in sin and shame; and that is what it meant for both Jew and Gentile convert.

Yet it must never be thought that Paul despised everything in the background of either Jew or Gentile. Firstly, everyone was part of the human race and that was the most important part of God's creation. Humanity had been made stewards of the wonderful works of God's natural world. Men and women had been made in the 'likeness and image of the Creator' and although so badly tarnished and corrupted, something of that original workmanship of God remained in each individual of the intelligent creation. Nor did the apostle to the Gentiles ever forget the debt he owed to his Jewish upbringing. He was not antinomian, refusing to accept law and order. He knew too well the value of the Law given by God through Moses. He saw that value greatly enhanced in the teaching of Jesus particularly in the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew chapters 5-7. He explained carefully the need of the ethical laws in any community. He directed those in his pastoral care toward greater holiness and purity of life. He was not ashamed to use examples from the ordinary cultural background, as did Jesus, in explaining the things of the spirit, such as the work of the farmer, soldier or athlete. Paul never wore sectarian blinkers that made him partially blind. Nevertheless, the wonderful word pictures that he drew never gave the impression that he wanted to relinquish his hold on Christ.

Paul's freedom enabled him to preach and fellowship with all others who shared the privilege of being in Christ. Human barriers could not frustrate the purpose of God in reconciling members of Christ's body to each other. He could enjoy table fellowship with men and women of every ethnic background and every type of social status. He happily sat as equal with Roman, African and child of Abraham and he expected them to want to sit with him. All this had come about because he had yielded **all** to Christ, and now was empowered by the Holy Spirit to say and to do things which he could never have done or said before he met the Lord on the Damascus road. That Spirit had wit-

nessed within him that he was a child of God and that he could look into the face of the Almighty Creator and call Him 'Father' in the most intimate way. This is something that Jesus had done and taught His disciples to do, and which only those who come to God through Christ can ever hope to do. How tellingly this is brought out in Bilquis Sheikh's book 'I dared to call Him Father'. Into this wonderful fellowship the brethren in Galatia had come. They had experienced something of the joys and responsibilities of being the sons of God but were now willing to sacrifice these for the unholy and worthless trappings of human religion, Jewish or pagan.

The world may have greatly changed since the days of Paul and those young churches, but the principles remain the same. Christians today can still be lured away from their freedom and responsibilities in Christ. The world in which we live is still full of 'slavish habits' that would ensnare the unwary believer. The Devil and his angels of darkness may have updated their outer garments but their weapons can be just as lethal to our Christian life as they were two thousand years ago. Like the faithful of old (Job for example) none can harm or destroy that which is in the hollow of God's hand. Our Father will permit temptations and trials only so far as they are good for us. The world becomes ever more enticing with the development of colour and sound by modern technology. Many of its products are harmless and innocent. They may even be useful and promote good causes within church and society. But they are so interesting. They begin to take our time, our money and our whole selves into a fascinating vortex, until the life surrendered to Christ is completely taken up with the computer, the hi-fi and the 'automobile'. These things may serve the Kingdom of Heaven well, but they are servants and not masters – we have only One. Just as animals are slaves to instincts so humans can become slaves to habits – hooked on to an addictive activity as strongly as any drug. It can even happen if we become totally absorbed in an aspect of Christian service or Scriptural study. Anything which blots out the Sun of righteousness or that distracts from the one goal of our calling, is bringing us into captivity.

Freedom in Christ does not give us licence to infringe the liberty of another brother or sister in Him. That freedom which we claim for ourselves is also the right of every other member of the Body of

Christ. This requires alertness and sensitivity so that we safeguard the privileges of others, as well as our own. Those who have been long in the way and are much experienced in Christian matters, are particularly vulnerable to this weakness. Observation will readily show that this is human nature. It is a human malady of which the sufferers are sadly unaware. On the other hand, all in Christ, however long or short their experience, have a duty to make sure that their words and actions do not cause unnecessary pain and offence to another brother or sister in the Lord. A sensitivity to others' feelings and awareness of others' needs is part of our Christian development. An unwillingness to cause any form of stumbling to another for whom Christ died will prevent the angry word or careless action. As we look down the pages of history, many in the name of Christ have held others in bondage, literally or metaphorically. Perhaps there is no captivity so bitter as that caused by fellow Christians. We are sons and daughters of the Most High. He has been so gentle and patient with us. He gives us enough freedom to grow and develop into the likeness of the Lord, but do we follow the example?

"Love is the fulfilling of the law". We who are in Christ are not outside law and order. It is a very hard law, virtually impossible from the human point of view. It requires sacrifice and effort. Keeping God's law may be painful and sometimes very hard. Not all folk are easy to love. There is no more powerful means of breaking bondage inside or outside the church than the power of love. The demonstration of the Christ-like life in every relationship and in every activity of life is the real and lasting way of breaking the chain which readily entangle the lives of men and women everywhere. This is the fulfilment of the 'law' in every dot and comma.

Paul uses an allegory to teach freedom in Christ with reference to the covenants and the lives of two ladies of long ago. The way we live and not 'labels or badges' we wear will determine whether we are in 'Sarah's family' or with 'Hagar's son'. The difference is in the approach to 'Father' and whether we have "affectionate, confidential intimacy of our access to God in prayer" (Stott) then our words and actions will be those of a true child of God and of a true brother or sister in Christ.

(To be continued)

DN

ABRAM OF THE MOST HIGH GOD

*A lesson from
Genesis 14*

The story of Abraham's victorious conflict with the four kings of Babylon is one of the strangest and most intriguing in the Bible. Not only does it introduce the mystic figure of Melchizedek, Priest-King of Salem, but it intrigues us by reason of its apparent separateness from the rest of Genesis. It is a scrap of political history of the times, in which Abraham became involved, but having no apparent connection with his life before or after. We hear no more of Melchizedek or of the Babylonian kings, or of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet the story has been recorded for a purpose or it would not be there at all. As one reads the narrative and reflects upon this warlike aspect of Abraham's character, so unlike the picture so consistently presented in the rest of his life story the reason surely begins to appear. The idea of Abraham as a man of faith is a very familiar one. In this chapter and here alone he is depicted as a man of war, battling for the triumph of the right. That reminds us that we who are the "children of the faithful Abraham" are called, not only to go through life sustained by a firm and unwavering faith, as did he, but also when occasion demands, sally forth to engage in Christian warfare for the defence of the things we hold dear and the driving away of God's enemies from His domain. The fact that the weapons of the Christian warfare are "not carnal" does not by any means belittle the value of the lessons we can draw from this incident where Abraham showed convincingly that he was by no means a novice in the arts of material warfare.

The climax of the story comes when Abraham, returning from his defeat of the retreating Babylonian kings, bringing with him the recovered captives and their goods, receives the patriarchal blessing of Melchizedek, the Priest-King of the land. The great truth that stands out so plainly is that Abraham did not receive the Melchizedek blessing because of his faith, but because of his successful warfare. Melchizedek is a picture of Christ in His glorious Millennial reign just as Aaron pictures His suffering, sacrificial life in this age. Is this story of Genesis 14 intended to illuminate the contrast between the two pictures? Faith, devotion, suffering and sacrifice are all part of the Christian life just as all these things were characteristic of our Lord's life on earth, and all this was pictured by the High Priestly service of Aaron.

Abraham experiences all these things in his life also and so that life became a marvellous allegory of the life of any and every Christian. But warfare is also a characteristic of the Christian life – the Apostle Paul counsels that we take unto ourselves the whole armour of God that we may be able to withstand the assaults of the Devil. We are to resist every encroachment of the world and every enticement that would draw us away from our consecration to God. We are not only to avoid sin in ourselves; we are to condemn it in others, holding up the standard of God's righteousness and making known the Truth that is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. It is when we have accomplished that task that we can look for the Melchizedek blessing and be called to sit on one of those thrones on which the glorified saints shall sit and reign for a thousand years. This story therefore can have much to teach us and we do well to look at it not only from the historical viewpoint, for of course it really did happen, but also, and more intently, as an allegory teaching important truths to us as we, like Abraham, forsake our native land to go to one which God will show us.

Abraham had lived in Canaan some twenty years when these stirring events broke into the even tenor of his life. How long the family lived in Haran before the death of Terah we do not know but it is probable that the departure from Ur of the Chaldees was thirty or forty years in the past. That had been a big step, to give up the luxury and refinements of a civilised city and go out "*not knowing whither he went*" as the writer to the Hebrews puts it. A fitting picture of consecration! All that the world has to offer, given up and left behind for what? A visionary promise of a better land that one has never seen, with the certainty of hardship, loss and suffering, in the attaining of that land. Ur of the Chaldees was a busy sea-port and a commercial city; it is more than likely that Abraham was a prosperous merchant or trader of some sort. When he came into Canaan he had to become like everybody else there, a keeper of flocks and herds. It is possible that he had never lived in a tent in his life before; henceforth until the day of his death he lived in nothing else.

This is another wonderful picture of our consecration. Strangers and pilgrims in the earth! Ur to Haran, Haran to Moreh, Moreh to Bethel,

Bethel to Egypt, Egypt to Mamre, Mamre to Gerar, Gerar to Hebron, constantly wandering and never possessing in his own right any portion of the land that God had promised him until at the last he had to buy a piece in which to bury his beloved wife.

But he found God in that country! In leaving Ur of the Chaldees he left behind him for ever the worship of Sin the Moon-god; in Babylon he left behind him for ever the worship of Marduk the false redeemer. In coming to Canaan he found the God of his fathers the God they had worshipped before they went down to Ur to live with idolaters. He found Canaan, a land that worshipped the Most High God, and he found Salem, the city of peace, not far from Mamre where he spent most of his life, and Melchizedek who was both king of Salem and Priest of the Most High God. In answering the call to come out he had found God, and until the day of his death he dwelt as it were in the presence of God.

So, for that twenty years, and eighty years more, for Abraham lived one hundred years in Canaan altogether, he lived his life and awaited the fulfilment of the promise. To his seed God would give this land; in him and in his seed would all families of the earth be blessed. That was the promise that sustained him as he went quietly about his daily occupations. Though it tarry, it would surely come. It would not really tarry. It was in the calm confidence that Abraham adjusted himself in his new surroundings and soon found that he was becoming a prosperous man. His flocks and herds increased and his neighbours began to look on him with respect. These neighbours were peaceable and likeable folk. Abraham seems to have got on very well with them, probably much better than he had done with the people of Ur. These Amorites of Canaan were themselves descendants of Shem, and they were worshippers of the Most High God. (It was only seventy years ago that this fact was established, but it seems clear now that Abraham must have found the religious views of the Canaanites much in line with his own.) Abraham must have anticipated a promise to be given by Jesus two thousand years later, that in giving up father, mother, houses and lands for the sake of the kingdom of God, he had received even in this life an hundred-fold; and there was still the fulfilment of the promise for the future.

Into this quiet life of peace and prosperity there came the shattering blow of invasion. "It came to

pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king Ellasar, Chedorloomer king of Elam and Tidal king of nations, that these made war ..." (Gen. 14.1). The story is probably familiar enough. The four Babylonian kings had marched into Canaan to subdue the rebellion of the five cities around the Dead Sea. The insurrection was quickly crushed and the invaders commenced their homeward journey taking with them the spoil and captives, among whom were Abraham's nephew Lot and his family. Upon hearing the news, Abraham summoned his own private army, three hundred and eighteen strong, pursued the retreating enemy, attacked and defeated them and returned in triumph with the recovered captives and their property.

It has been thought strange that so small a force as three hundred and eighteen could put to flight the armies of four kings. In fact these kings, and all the kings of antiquity, were little more than petty chieftains and their armies, especially when engaged on distant expeditions such as this, were like raiding parties. Plenty of inscriptions now exist relating the stories of wars and sieges similar to this one and more or less contemporary with this one in which the numbers of the contending forces are given and they are often measured only in hundreds or at the most a few thousand. When the city-state of Umma laid siege to and captured the city-state of Lagash in the days of Eannatum II, the inscription says "the carnage was frightful"; but there were only six hundred men in the army of Umma! It is reasonable to expect that Abraham's men were familiar with the countryside. The Babylonians, a thousand miles from their own home, were not, and just as in the case of Gideon's army some eight centuries later, and in much the same territory, the smaller force assumed the initiative and took the enemy by surprise.

So Abraham returned home in triumph; but even in the day of triumph he still retained his separateness from the world around him. The king of Sodom in gratitude for the deliverance offered Abraham the whole of the recovered goods, asking only that the liberated captives be restored to him. Abraham's reply is a noble one. "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth" he says, "that I will not take ... anything that is yours, lest you should say 'I have made Abram rich'" (Gen. 14.22,23). It would have been a grievous snare to Abraham had he accepted the

other man's offer; he could hardly avoid thereafter being associated in some way or other with the king and people of Sodom. So the king of Sodom went back to his own city with his people and his goods, and Lot and his family went back with him. Abraham was left alone, but in his isolation, he cherished a reward and a treasure of much more lasting value than anything he had relinquished. He had the blessing of Melchizedek.

Now this blessing of Melchizedek was a most important thing. It was the climax to a solemn ceremony in which for the first time in Bible history, bread and wine are used in a ceremonial fashion. All the parties concerned were present in the valley of Shaveh, "the king's dale", a locality now quite unknown but probably quite near Jerusalem. Abraham himself, with his band of retainers, flushed with their victory; Anner, Eshcol and Mamre, the Amorite chieftains, and their men, who had apparently gone with Abraham under his leadership and helped in the victory; all these were worshippers of the Most High God. The king of Sodom was there; the lack of mention of the remaining kings of the five cities leads to the conclusion that they perished in the original battle; see v.10. Presiding over all was the venerable figure of Melchizedek himself, the acknowledged overlord of all these chieftains and kings, overlord not only of secular things but also in the things of God, a priest upon his throne.

The bread and wine were evidently partaken of by all the nobility present as a ritual feast. It was a symbolic acknowledgement that the blessings of life and prosperity come from God above. God had been merciful, and by the hand of His servant defeated the invader who had threatened to deprive them of life and prosperity. Hence the next stage in the ritual was to invoke the Divine blessing on the means of that deliverance. "*Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand!*" Note how all the glory is given to God.

The final act in the ceremony is equally impressive. Abraham comes forward and in the sight of all the spectators solemnly lays before Melchizedek, as representative of God, tithes of all the recovered property. God had wrought the deliverance; one tenth of the wealth must be returned to God. That is tantamount to recognition of Divine sovereignty. In symbol, it is a yielding of life and all that life holds, in dedication and consecration.

That is the picture for us. A day will come when the age-old conflict with evil will have ended so far as the Church is concerned and the greater Melchizedek comes forth with bread and wine to meet His faithful saints. Just as Abraham stood before the Canaanites and received the Divine blessing because of his valiant warfare, so will the Church be blessed in the sight of men. "*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.*" Just as Abraham received bread and wine at the hands of Melchizedek, so will the glorified Church enter into the joys of the 'wedding feast' at the 'marriage of the Lamb'.

That is not all. There is bread and wine for others also, just as there was for Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, 'the people of the land' among whom Abraham sojourned. So it is in the lesson for us, once the Church is with her Lord, the forces of evil will have been defeated and driven far away; there will be deliverance for the captives and an opening of the prison for them that are bound. The establishment of the Kingdom means bread and wine for all men; and it is then that tithes of all are presented to God. This will be the heartfelt consecration of the life to God of every right thinking person of the resurrected hosts whose deliverance has been so much greater than that of those few who came back with Abraham.

This experience must have been a turning point in Abraham's life. Previously he had exercised faith in God and had followed the call; one wonders though, how much he had proved God. Up to now Abraham had always been on the defensive and separated himself from the idolatry of Ur and departed out of Egypt as soon as his presence began to become obnoxious to them. Now for the first time he had taken the offensive against the forces of evil, and perhaps to his own surprise found that God was with him and endowed him with power to achieve a striking victory. Perhaps there is a lesson for us in that also. We get so used to withdrawing from contact with the world and its wickedness. In our assurance that God will one day rise up to make an end of evil we fail to realise that there is a case for our doing something towards it here and now. If Abraham had never taken the offensive and gone out to smite the army of Chedorlaomer he would never have received the blessing of Melchizedek. There is always the possibility that something very similar may yet prove to be true of us.

GIFTS TO OUR KING

A Christmas Meditation

"My son, give me your heart." (Proverbs 23:26) The wise men of the East came seeking the new-born Jesus, the King of the Jews, with presents of myrrh, frankincense and gold. From this incident we can gather some valuable suggestions respecting our obligations to the great Messiah, and the need to renew and increase them at the close of another year.

The wise men, three according to tradition, arrived at Jerusalem and began making inquiries respecting the new-born Jewish King. The news soon spread, and the holy city was in commotion because, according to the prophets, Messiah, promised for centuries, was due to appear about that time; and "All men were in expectation of him".

This expectancy naturally would be heightened by the coming of the wise men or Magi from a far country, supposedly Persia, to show homage to Messiah. The news finally reached the royal palace and King Herod himself. The latter, doubtless on his own account, felt a kind of jealousy toward anyone who would be likely to share the royal honours and dignities and thus detract from his own importance. Additionally he felt that as representative of Caesar's government, the protégé of the Roman Empire, it was his duty to see to it that no king should arise in the land under his jurisdiction, whose title or claims would in any measure conflict with those of Caesar.

Without attempting to determine how much or how little truth attaches to astrology, we have assurance that there was a truth connected with the appearance of a special and peculiar star. It guided the wise men of the east to the country of Messiah's birth and to the capital city of that country. The Lord may have given them additional understanding of the matter, just as He subsequently warned them in a dream. Herod cunningly affected to be deeply interested in the search of the wise men for the Messiah. He called the wise men of Judea to assist. These were not astrologers but chief priests and lawyers, men learned in the Law and prophets of Israel. He inquired where the prophets had foretold that the Messiah should be born. They promptly answered that it was "*Bethlehem of Judea*," and for that city, only six miles away, the eastern Magi set out. They

promised to return and identify to Herod, the baby King and where He might be found, ostensibly that the king might also go to worship at His feet. He really wanted such knowledge to destroy the baby Jesus. En route for Bethlehem the miraculous star that they had seen in the far east appeared to them again, apparently as a ball of light or of fire travelling near the earth. It served as a guide until rejoicing they reached the very house and found the baby and His mother.

Tacitus, Suetonius and Josephus tell us that throughout the entire east, at this time, there was an intense conviction, derived from ancient prophecies, that before long a powerful monarch would arise in Judea and gain dominion over the world. Virgil, who lived a little before this, says that a child from heaven was looked for, who should restore the Golden age and take away sin. Confucius had prophesied the appearance of such a deliverer and a deputation of his followers going forth in search of Him were the means of introducing Buddhism into China. The clearest of all these prophecies was by Zoroaster. The Nestorians say that Zoroaster was a disciple of Jeremiah from whom he learned about the Messiah and talked concerning Him to his disciples.

We should remember that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were princes in Persia and intimate with the wise men of that country, which at that time was the principal nation of the world. It is easy to see how traditions would be handed down, especially as Daniel's prophecy respecting the time of Messiah's birth might be well known to the disciples of Zoroaster, Persia's wise men. There were Jews scattered abroad throughout that country who more or less kept alive the thought of Israel's hope for the great Messiah so long promised of God, prophesied of one bringing blessings not only to Israel but through them to all families of the earth.

God chose as messengers of His good tidings not only wise men but reverential men, men of faith and His choice of these messengers from the east to arouse the people of Judea and Jerusalem as heralds of the great King was not an exception to the rule. Although not of the nation with which God had so far dealt and given His promises, they were, nevertheless, good, reverential men. They

delighted to know of the coming blessings of peace on earth and goodwill amongst men through whatever nationality the Lord was pleased to find His representative.

In one respect many Christians could learn numerous important lessons from these wise Gentiles. No false patriotism stood in their way to hinder their appreciation of Divine favour to the children of men. When they found the Saviour they were not daunted by His humble home surroundings. They worshipped Him in three ways: Firstly, they fell before Him, physically expressing their reverence. Secondly, they worshipped Him in their hearts, giving expression to their rejoicing and confidence. Thirdly, they opened their treasure-box and presented to Him three gifts appropriate to royalty, the myrrh representing submission, frankincense representing praise and gold representing obedience.

The reverent spirit of these noble heathen men who had so little light, and so little knowledge respecting the great Messiah and His work, should bring to our cheeks a blush of shame. We can reflect that we are favoured with brighter light to guide us to the Lamb of God. We see His star in a better and truer sense and are guided to Him by the prophecies. We have found not only a baby but One who bears our sorrows and carries our grief. He made His soul an offering for sin so that by His stripes we are healed. Therefore, what kind of oblation should we pour at the feet of Him who loved us and bought us with His precious blood? With what deep reverence have we bowed the knee, prostrated ourselves and given outward evidence through our bodies of full submission to our great King? Him we know and through His gracious provision for us and for the world of mankind we have heard, not uncertainly, but with the voice of Him who speaks from heaven. Have we offered our myrrh? Have we shown willingness for service even in bitter experiences, in joy to honour the King as we suffer with Him? Have we worshipped Him in heart? This is not an outward form of powerless godliness but an offering to Him of the frankincense of heart adoration, appreciation and gratitude.

Have we laid at His feet our earthly substance, our gold? Have we realised that all that we have and all that we are is but an offering far too small. Will this be our attitude through coming days till the end of our present pilgrimage?

The apostle's words, "*Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship*", (Rom. 12.1) apply not only to the initial consecration of our hearts to the Lord, but, as the Scriptures express it, to a covenant of sacrifice, an agreement to die daily to self and to be alive more and more in the Lord's service. Thus we shall glorify Him in our bodies and spirits which are His. If we have lacked in this in the past, shall it be so in future? Shall we not continue to grow in knowledge, to grow in love, in service, in worship and in the privilege of laying our little all at the feet of Him who is our gracious Heavenly King. His Kingdom is so soon to be established and He has invited us to sit with Him in His throne, to share His glory and to be participants as spiritual Israel in the great work of blessing the whole world of mankind, every kindred, people nation and tongue.

Our opening text is well worth remembering. This does not apply to sinners who are not sons in any sense of the word. The message to sinners is a call to repentance and to forsake sin. Only those who have repented of sin and who trust in the precious blood of Christ are reconciled to God and may take to themselves the words "*My son, give me your heart.*" When we give our hearts, it includes all that we have and are, in the highest and noblest and fullest sense. That which was illustrated by the gifts of the wise men is represented in the brief statement, "*Give me your heart.*" Whoever gives his heart to the Lord fully and unreservedly, gives his body, his worship, his reverence and praise. He gives also his earthly treasure, time, talents influence, money – all – to be used in joyful service for the glory of the King.

All who have never answered this call are urged to do so now. To those who have given their hearts to the Lord, we urge a remembrance of the fact that the sacrifice once put upon the altar must remain there and that the longer it remains the more joyful should be the service. In this, every opportunity for sacrifice becomes more appreciated and our hearts become more thankful. In turn each experience become richer and brings the peace of God which passes all understanding, ruling in our hearts and preparing us for the glorious things which God has reserved for those who truly love and reverence Him.

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